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# IN YEARS OF TRANSITION





# IN YEARS OF TRANSITION

*By*  
SAMUEL  
GORDON

*Author of*  
*A Handful of*  
*Exotics, etc*



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## IN YEARS OF TRANSITION



### CHAPTER FIRST

### *FATHER, SON, AND THE WORLD'S DESIRE*

IT was miserable weather. Outside the rain went drip, drip, drip, steadily, unremittingly, like the sullen jog-trot of dray horses that are weary with a long journey and yet must plod on. At intervals there came a gust of wind that lashed the downpour like a whip, urging it into faster pace, and no one could have told if the sound, half moan, half whine, that followed each scourging, was the remonstrance of the raindrops, or the cry of the hurricane as it broke itself against the steep corner of the little house at the end of the street. The two men inside sat listening and wondering how long the sheaves would keep their hold on the rafters. It was no unusual thing for the villagers of the little Normandy hamlet to find the roof thatch torn off over their heads during the ravings of the Equinox.

"We cannot put it off any longer, Camille," said the older man at length, as he brushed back the spare hair at his temples with a resolute hand. "You are nineteen, and there is no provision made for your



career in life. If you stay here another year, all your energies will mortify. I have taught you all I can; you have learnt for yourself a good deal more than I could teach you. Go and see if the world can make use of what we both know."

"You insist on my leaving you, father?" said the other. "You are old and ill; it would tax all your strength to put a log of timber on the fire. There is not a man or woman in this place who would stir a finger to put straight the pillow on your death-bed."

"What makes you think so?" asked the old man. "Of course I am well and strong. I can look after myself, and Babette comes here very often."

"When she is too drunk to go further," broke in the boy; "you cannot deceive me—what is this?" He held up a handkerchief with two dark stains on it. "I found it under the washing tub as I went to rinse our linen."

"That—that?" stammered the old man in confusion. "It is fresh paint from the *Maitre's* garden hedge. I happened to brush my fingers against it and rubbed it off with the cloth."

"You cannot put me off with that," cried the boy hotly; "this is no paint—it's blood, your life-blood. You cough and cough, and though you shut your mouth ever so tight, I can still hear the hacking and hammering going on inside you. I know what it is—these village louts, with their iron-headed brats, are murdering you by inches. First they starve you, and then they tear your lungs out of your body."

"What am I to do, my son?" said the other sadly. "Beggars may not choose. Were we not glad enough, when I came here with you six years ago, that they gave us this hut to rest our aching limbs?"

Well, they have made me work for it—it is but fair. No man should eat the bread of idleness. What if they had made me chop wood instead of teaching their children?"

"It would have been healthier," replied the boy. Then, after a momentary silence, he continued with almost a shout: "After all, how can I blame them? What business had I, great hulking gluttonous scoundrel that I am, to sit by and see you drudging yourself to a skeleton? I might have been a farm hand or ploughman, or bricklayer, and have earned enough to keep you in comfort. No, instead I pore over my books and feed like a hog at the trough without even thinking where the fodder comes from."

"You have no cause for reproaching yourself," said the old man quietly. "You badgered me often enough to let you earn a living for us both in the sweat of your brow. Shall I tell you a secret? I refused out of sheer selfishness—to please my vanity, if you prefer it. I have lost caste as a gentleman; but I have determined to regain it in my son. A village schoolmaster? I tell you, boy," and a flush spread over the pale cheeks, "I tell you, your father once aimed higher. I have failed; I rely on you to achieve what was denied to me. It is for you to retrieve what I have lost—in you I shall be regenerated. Do you see why I would not let you work with your hands?"

"However lowly the labour, the cause would have exalted it" said the boy.

"That is a commonplace—it is easy to invent them when they serve a purpose. But it does not serve mine. Have I sacrificed so much only that you

should now spurn the sacrifice? Unless you think I have no right to dispose of your future."

"You may dispose of me for life and death," said the boy, and the tears welled slowly into his eyes. "Only do not make me leave you—not yet, at least; later on perhaps."

"How do I know that there is much of 'a later on' for me?" asked the old man solemnly. "And because there is not much time to lose, you must succeed quickly."

"I have an idea, father," said the boy eagerly; "Can we not make a compromise? Then I can begin at once. There are only three people in this place who do not work with their hands—the parson, the attorney, and the schoolmaster. I cannot expect either of the first two to give up their places to me; and therefore I can only have the schoolmaster's—and that is at your disposal. Resign your post to me."

The old man shook his head smilingly. "No indeed; I will not resign it to you. What would come of it? Once you are there, you will continue there all your life. That is not the success I mean, Camille."

"What am I to do?" said Camille helplessly. "I have puzzled and puzzled till my five senses are in a tangle, all for nothing."

The old man looked full into the boyish face. "I can tell you: you must go far away from here—right into the midst of the arena where the world struggles. There will be room for one more to wrestle. There may be, there will be, many others stronger than you, and you cannot expect to be victorious all at once. But remember this: there is no obstacle for him who does not mind a few trips and falls, although

he may bruise himself in many places. Go, Camille—go to Paris, the great city that makes beggars of kings, and kings of beggars.”

“Then let us go together,” replied Camille instantly.

“What? Fetter your hands from the start? Take a dead weight on your shoulders and totter on under it? What chance will you have with me to drag you down? You will want all your strength for yourself; you will want your eyes to look before you—not behind, to see if I am not falling too much to the rear. Old men are lumber—you must go alone.”

Camille sat with the shadow of despair over his eyes. What could he do? His father was right. There was no prospect for him in Lunette, none other than to live the life of a vegetable, and finally, to be buried in the tumble-down old cemetery. To refuse to go would be shirking, nay worse, cowardly.

“If I must, I must,” he said with a sigh. And then with a sudden access of resolution he continued: “After all, it is more to fight for you than for me. It is to win ease and comfort for you, to make a soft bed for your old age, with wine and good food . . . .”

“Yes, yes, that is it,” said the old man hastily, glad to encourage this view of the question. “You will be a rich man, and we shall ride in a carriage like M. le Comte up at the Castle, and drink Bordeaux—the real stuff, you know; I have forgotten the taste, but I know it’s a good thing. And moreover, my son, I do not send you out into the world penniless; just push the lamp over here and we shall count.”

He took out a bundle of paper-money, and Camille opened his eyes wide, very wide.

“Where did you get that from?” he asked in astonishment. “You must have found it.”

"I did not find it—I stole it."

"Stole it? From whom?"

"From you," was the grave answer.

Camille, despite his heaviness of heart, burst into a laugh. "From me, who have scarcely ever handled a sou-piece in my life? You must be a wizard, father."

"I stole it from you," persisted the old man. "Do you remember the time, four years ago it is now, when I cut down our meals from three to two per day? You said nothing—you asked no questions—you hungered in silence; it was just when you were growing, too, and when the most I could give was not enough for you. It was then that I started making provision for the time that is now at hand, when you would have to go afield cutting your own way. Perhaps this will be enough to buy the pickaxe. Here it is—take it; it is your own, the three hundred and twenty francs. Did I not tell you I stole them from you?"

"They are all for me?" cried Camille when he found voice once more.

"All—I scraped and ground, but I could not make more of it."

"And your share of the starving counts for nothing?"

"How for nothing? Are you not going to repay me with interest? Why, this is merely a speculation of mine. I invest my savings in you, fully expecting that you will make me ample return on the loan. You shall see what a usurer I can be."

The old man smiled feebly at his jest. His voice sounded firm, but his heart was breaking. That miserable quibble about being selfish! He selfish where his boy was concerned? Because he wanted to

be rich, because he wanted to drink wine, was that the reason he was sending him away, out of sight, out of hearing, casting him adrift to sail his own ship, a freebooter on the dangerous high seas of life? Had he been selfish, he would have kept him by his side, frittering away the precious years among pig dealers and butter churners, in the desolate little village where all count of time was lost in the eternal monotony of routine. Deliberately and of purpose he was giving up his only joy in life. What if it meant a snapping of heart strings and a dreary outlook into a solitary, haphazard future? He would bear it gladly. It is good to make sacrifice for those one loves.

There was one great fear that had been haunting old Eugene Clairmont for years past, the fear that his son's life might be a repetition of his own, a poverty-stricken, scrap and rag and patch life in which the morrow always loomed ahead a threatening, inevitable terror. The hand-to-mouth struggle he had lived he felt more keenly by comparison with the better days he had known—until Antoinette had died. After that things went downhill, till at last the dingy little book shop, on which he had subsisted, caught fire, and he got burned out of house and home. Then with his wanderer's staff in one hand, and leading little Camille by the other, he had gone into the world, trudging the country, with wayside ditches for their bed, and cottage thresholds for their board, till they had come here, to Lunette, just as the old schoolmaster had died and the little clodhoppers of the place wanted some one to teach them their elements. It was not a lucrative nor honourable post. The peasants did not put a high value on learning; they had their children taught

to satisfy the stupid law that had come into force some years ago, and the teacher was a necessary evil, on whom they looked askance, as on any other infliction. But the energy which Eugene Clairmont was not required to bestow on his official duties he employed in that labour of love, the instruction of his son. There was a good deal he taught him; for by much laborious study old Clairmont had penetrated beneath the surface of many things, and Camille was a greedy learner and sucked in knowledge as a sponge water. That was all he could do for him; he could teach him no trade, no profession, and at last he grew afraid lest the boy's intelligence and character should become stunted for want of expanding room. And so come what may, he must go forth towards a wider horizon, an ampler sphere, and make his opportunities, so that his opportunities might make him.

"Yes, my boy," continued the old man; "here is the money and with it the moral how something can be made of nothing. When your heart is at the bottom of your stomach, remember how your father with his five hundred francs a year became a capitalist where another would have become a suicide."

"Remember?" echoed Camille, "there is no fear of that; men like you are not easily forgotten by their sons. Thank you, father." He seized the old withered hand and kissed it.

"So that is settled," said his father cheerily; "you are going to Paris, you will do the journey in comfort, you have something to thrust the wolf from the door for a month or two, and in the meantime keep your eyes open and don't study your finger nails. In

the worst of cases you have another string to your bow."

"Yes, I can come back," suggested Camille readily.

"No, that you must not do ; we shall not see each other again till you have succeeded, or till I come to seek you myself. But if all else fails, search out your uncle."

"My what?" asked Camille in surprise.

"Your uncle—my brother."

"My uncle—your brother," echoed the boy, his wonder deepening.

"That is to say," explained old Clairmont, "he was my brother five and twenty years ago. There was some quarrel between us—it is such a long time, I hardly remember why. I suppose it was because Antoinette happened to love me better than him. It was an unlucky accident. When I gained my wife, I lost my brother."

"Lost, irretrievably lost?" asked Camille.

"It seems so ; when I got married he sent me a skull and cross bones for a wedding present. I have not heard from him since."

"The brute—on your wedding day?"

"It was not a happy idea, was it? And it seems that my fortune has taken its cue from the omen. But that does not concern you ; his quarrel is with me. Tell him you are her son, and that he should be good to you for the sake of her memory. Ask for Arsène Clairmont, the millionaire. (I know he is alive ; three months ago he gave a hundred thousand francs to the poor when his only son became of age—the papers said it ; and a man who does that is not dead to all goodness."

"Mark my word, father—he did it for effect," cried



Camille, struggling with his anger. The skull and cross bone episode had made his blood boil. The curse that it implied had indeed taken effect. His mother had died before she could taste the joy of motherhood. His father had become a bankrupt, a vagabond, and an outcast in his old age; perhaps the doom of misfortune it had brought might also be the heritage of their offspring. His solitary boyhood, the haunting loneliness of moor and mountain and forest had bred in him quaint aspects of belief, half religion and as much superstition. Sometimes, as it did now, it broke out, despite the remonstrance of his keen-sighted reason. He laughed at it one instant and quailed before it the next. And just now it swept across his mind with a presentiment of evil which he could not master for all his resolution. And then again the buoyancy of youth lifted him up and carried him smoothly on waves of hope into the future. He would succeed, augury of good or augury of ill. Why should there be shadows or spectres in his life? Sunshine was cheap; prince and pauper paid the same price for it. He would try and make his heart a laboratory for the manufacture of sunshine.

He broke the pause during which his father had been listening to the sounds and voices of the tempest outside.

"Very well, father; I shall visit him and ask him to help me; perhaps there may yet be a chance of reconciliation between you."

Old Clairmont looked dubious. "I have forgiven him long ago; you can but make the attempt. I should like to press my brother's hand before I die. To you he can be of great service. His word must carry great weight. And when you start earning,

start saving; you must hoard every centime; you must make it go twice the length other people would. That is the way to get rich, and without riches there can be no happiness. Do you hear? Without riches, no happiness. I have learnt that lesson by heart."

Camille nodded silently. He wondered if what his father said was true, for despite their poverty and cheeserind-scraping economy he had sometimes felt happy as a king. Well, he would soon be in Paris, and Paris was the oracle of the world, where one could learn all mysteries.

The next two days Camille spent in cutting turf, chopping wood, and hoeing potatoes for his father's use during the winter. Then he made up his bundle of books and clothes—somewhat less than would require two horses to convey—and on the third morning he and his father went out of the village towards Rayonne, the nearest railway station. Camille did not tell his father of the hundred and sixty francs he had left behind out of his store; he had put the money in the empty milk-bowl, where his father would be sure to see it. What was the use of wasting words over the matter?

At the first milestone they parted. Long they looked into each others' eyes, holding each other by both hands, till Camille tore himself away, with the old man's last words ringing in his ears. "Camille, when I die, let me be buried like a gentleman."

## CHAPTER SECOND

## *KRANTZ AND THE GENTLE ART OF IRONY*

WHEN Camille reached Rayonne, instead of going into the station, he turned to the left, where the high road led on to Paris. He thought walking a cheaper mode of travelling. But in determining to make his journey on foot, he had forgotten to take into account his hosts and their little bills. And as he was too honest by nature to decamp in the morning without paying what he owed, his stock was becoming woefully attenuated; and the less there was to count, the more time he took in counting it. But what did it matter? Every step brought him nearer to Paris, where there was plenty of money, enough for all and for him. And so when he saw its towers and steeples looming aloft in the distance, he drew a long breath; at last he had come into the Land of Promise. He took out the three louis d'or that remained to him, and looked at them disdainfully as though he only kept them because he was undecided whether to throw them to the right or to the left.

Presently he had arrived at the outskirts of the city, and soon was passing through broad avenues lined with splendid mansions. It was as he had expected: stone houses everywhere, no mud huts with rotten straw for covering and branches for gables—things that were the order of the day at Lunette.

"These people have much better taste," he thought to himself; "they go in for façades and balconies and parapets—it must be very pleasant to live here."

And he looked round him with a general air of approval. And just then he caught sight of a neatly-built house, smaller than the others, but much prettier to look at.

"I think I should like this one," he told himself. And without more ado he went up and pulled the bell-knob. At the sound, the concierge thrust his head out of the side window of his little lodge and scanned the arrival from head to foot.

"What, more beggars?" he snarled. "Can't a man eat a meal in quiet without having it snatched from between his teeth? Get off."

"I don't want anything to eat," said Camille slowly, for his reception had taken him somewhat aback; "I only want to know how much it costs to live in this house."

"The rooms are all let" came the grudging reply; "and the fifth storey, the highest up, costs fifty francs a week."

Camille stood gaping at him.

"When you have sufficiently admired my physiognomy, perhaps you will let me get back to my soup—it is quite cold already," went on the concierge savagely.

Camille did not wait for a second dismissal, but turned and fled incontinently. This was not a promising outlook. If he had known things were so dear, he would have slept on haystacks or in cattle folds instead of asking for comfortable feather beds at the wayside inns.

And so he went on, gazing at the wondrous sights

around him. And as he proceeded further, he noticed that not all the people he met had well-fed faces and weather-proof clothing, and here and there he elbowed a passer-by whose coat showed rents that looked like blow-holes, through which the wind might whistle merrily. And then the crowds and crowds of human beings! Was there enough to eat for all of them, or did they sometimes take to devouring one another? It was quite true what the concierge had said: there *were* beggars in Paris. For just now he saw a whole family of them trudging along, casting shy hungry glances into the faces of those they passed. And when he thought there were only sixty francs between him and these, he thrust his hand into his pocket and convulsively clutched the precious pieces of money, to make sure they were there. He hardly liked the looks of the folks whom he watched hurrying, strolling, or slouching by according to their mood or errand. There was something stern and loveless about their narrow mouths and thin pursed-up lips, as though they were under oath not to smile or look pleasant. Surely that man who had just passed him and had shot that quick furtive glance at him must be a cut-throat, or must be harbouring some devilish thought; at any rate, in the country people never went about with such an expression on their faces, unless they had the stomach-ache badly.

And that reminded him of the ache in his own stomach. It was eleven in the morning when he had entered the city, and now it was three, and already the drab autumn day was beginning to cast its shadows. He was opposite one of the small cabarets that stud the streets of the working quarter; it looked cheap, and he thought he could do no better than to make

his meal there. So he entered and sat down, made his choice from the greasy scrap that did duty for a menu, and gave his order.

"You must pay in advance," said the proprietor.

"Why?" asked Camille ingenuously.

"Because people come here, eat their fill, and then turn their pockets inside out to show me they are empty. I must safeguard myself."

"If that is all," said Camille with a lordly air, "I shall soon put your mind at rest; here, take your price."

He fished out one of the three louis d'or—he had no change; he had given away the last piece of silver for his breakfast that morning. A hungry look shot from the man's eyes as he saw the gold. Gingerly he took the coin, as if he were not in the habit of handling its like, and was just about to give the necessary change, when a thought seemed to strike him. He examined the piece closely, bit it between his teeth, and shook his head mysteriously. Then he went into the room at the back of the shop and returned after a minute's absence looking black and threatening.

"You young gallow's bird," he shouted; "you are still worse than the others. You want to eat me out of house and home, and moreover be paid for it? If I did not pity your youth I should call the police and hand you over to justice—have you any more of these coins about you? Let me have them at once."

Camille sat white to his lips and trembling in every limb; what did the man mean? Why was he so angry?

"I have two more—here they are, good sir," he said, yielding readily to propitiate the ruffian.

The man went back to the room, and came out again immediately with a mocking laugh.

"Just as I thought," he said; "you can't play your tricks on me, for all your baby-face, you dear innocent turtle-dove. With all your whining and whimpering you can't deceive me; I have caught older hands than you."

"I am not deceiving you," said Camille, with tears of indignation in his eyes. "I never deceive people."

"Thank you, not after you are found out, of course; just listen to this," and he planked one of the coins on the table; it fell with a leaden blunted sound. "Counterfeit, you young vagabond—you could not buy the eye of a needle for it. Out with you, before a gendarme comes along, or my sense of duty may be too strong for me; here, take your rubbish away with you."

He thrust the coins into Camille's hand, and then hustled him out of the doorway.

Camille stood outside for a second, amazed and helpless. Surely the man must be mistaken; everywhere else they had taken his louis d'ors in payment only too willingly. But what could he do against the blustering fellow who pitched him out without letting him argue one word! He moved off quickly to get away from the crowd that was beginning to collect; for a big overgrown boy, standing in the streets with tears rolling down his cheeks is not a sight one sees every minute of the day.

The lamps were beginning to be lighted, and what with his tears and the glare of artificial light, to which he was not accustomed, he shuffled along awkwardly, almost gropingly, stumbling against people and pursued by execrations for his clumsiness. And that was

not exactly the way to make his heavy heart lighter; everybody seemed to have a grudge against him, the poor stranger boy, who wished no one any harm, who would have been only too eager to grasp a friendly hand had it been proffered to him. But that was not all; suddenly he remembered that his hands had been feeling considerably more disencumbered than they had done all through his journey, and looking down, he found that his knapsack, containing all his paltry belongings, had disappeared. His heart stood still—that was the last straw. Had he, in his bewilderment, left it behind at the cabaret? Or had it been conjured out of his hand by magic? In this pandemonium everything seemed possible. But question himself as he might, the knapsack was gone, and with it his “Plutarch’s Lives” and his “Fénélon,” and the warm woollen socks which his father had given him of his own scanty store, and which Camille had begrudged himself to wear on the journey.

He stopped and gazed round him disconsolately. What was to be done now? Rated all in all, he was just worth the clothes he had to his back and the three pieces of spurious metal in his pocket—not much for assets. His liabilities to himself were a substantial meal and a lodging for the night. It was just as well to deceive himself no longer, and declare himself bankrupt at once. Somehow this decision made him more cheerful; for now, having admitted that he had nothing to lose, he had everything to gain, and that surely is the most enviable situation in which one can be placed.

So, dashing the tears from his eyes, he strode on with uplifted head, looking boldly before him. Suddenly he caught sight in the distance of a broad,



smooth expanse, shimmering like silver in the gathering moonlight; it might be the approach to some fairy-palace for all he knew. Quickening his steps, he made for it eagerly, and when he came closer he saw it was no fairy-palace, but the bosom of the glorious river that dragged itself onward, superbly majestic, all unconscious of the ephemeral life surging along its sides, and which, however fast it surged, would come to a stop one day, whilst its own poured forth immeasurably, eternally. Camille felt small and ridiculous as he stood watching it, half ashamed of his petty necessities in the presence of this limitless, irresponsible, elemental existence. And then again there seemed something kindly and good-humoured in the leisurely onflow of the bright-gleaming waves, and involuntarily the words broke from his lips:

"Mother Seine, I am hungry."

And it was as though there came back the answer: "My son, in this world there is no satisfying, no completing; everything falls short of its desires. I am bursting with my own satiety, and yet I never fulfil myself."

Camille was awakened from his dreamings by a slight push he felt at his elbow, and on turning he saw close beside him a figure standing with both arms firmly planted on the parapet of the embankment. At his movement it stirred, and, slowly raising its head, turned its eyes deliberately on Camille. They were keen, quick-witted eyes, full of self-possession and world-knowledge. They belonged to a man who might be forty, although the scraggy, untrimmed beard probably made him look older than he was.

"You have deceived me, my friend," said the apparition, after a full minute's imperturbable stare.

"Deceived you?" said Camille, disconcerted. This was the second time in the day that some one had made use of the expression to him; was there a conspiracy among all those with whom he came into touch to saddle him with the reputation of an accomplished liar and cheat? "As far as a human being can be certain," he continued, quavering, "I have never spoken a word to you in my life, nor even set eyes on you before this, so how can I have practised any deception on you?"

"It's not a criminal offence, and I won't have you prosecuted for it," said the other lightly. "I was passing by, and saw you standing quite absorbed in the view before you. And as I am a lover of the beautiful, I stopped to see if there was anything worth while looking at; but there was not. Consequently you are responsible for my having wasted five minutes of my valuable time."

"I apologise," said Camille, with a breath of relief. The stranger's explanation precluded the idea of the police having to interfere, and Camille dreaded the police with all the terror of a villager. "I was just looking at the river for want of something else to do," he went on.

"Then you are fortunate," was the reply; "other people must earn their living."

"It's a thing I should very much like to do," said Camille eagerly; "could you help me with your advice?"

For the first time he observed his interlocutor more closely. If his time was valuable, his clothes were evidently not in the same predicament, for the rims of his coat sleeves and trousers were oozing out into numerous fringes. No doubt he was a mechanic or artizan of some sort.

"I regret," answered the man, "I do not follow any calling myself; I live on my means."

Camille's heart sank. The other saw the disappointed look on his face, and continued:

"However, I shall consult with my friend Ricotte, the glassblower, and possibly we may find a berth for you."

"I am more than grateful to you," said Camille impetuously; "you are to me a messenger from heaven."

"I never thought there was anything angelic about me," was the laughing reply; "and besides, you had better reserve your gratitude till you have more patent cause for it. Pray, if it is not an indiscreet question, for what reason have you come to Paris? You are a new arrival, evidently."

"Father sent me here to become rich. He says one cannot be happy without riches, and it is very hard to obtain them in the villages," said Camille, with a burst of confidence.

The stranger stopped back three paces, and looked Camille up and down.

"My dear friend—I suppose I may call you so, considering the length of our acquaintance," he said at last; "you will pardon me, but you are either a great genius or an idiot. You ask me to find you a livelihood, and then you tell me your object in coming here is to rake together millions. How are you going to do it?"

Camille stood nonplussed. Great heavens! Why had he not thought of it before? The two things seemed so immeasurably, so hopelessly apart; he was puzzled how ever he got the idea that one implied the other.

"I don't know," he stammered; "I thought one works, one earns money, one accumulates."

"Admirable logic," laughed the other. "A little countrified, though. Look here, my dear fellow. You asked me to find you employment. I said that was a matter for consideration. But if you want to become rich, I can advise you much more easily. There are more ways of doing the one than the other."

"Can you really tell me how to become rich?" gasped Camille.

"Certainly. How would it suit you to be a peripatetic financier?" asked the man, with a strange twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"A what?" asked Camille.

"You won't find it in the directory of trades and professions. Perhaps you will understand better if I go into detail. My friend Ricotte, who is an authority on the subject, says that the present wretchedness of the human race is due practically to the congested state of capital. A peripatetic financier is a sort of broker who negotiates a larger circulation for money, whether in kind, coin, or specie. He rectifies the inequality of its distribution by subtracting it where it has accumulated in superabundance, and adding it to the stock of those who are insufficiently provided therewith. In fact, he is an element in the system of civilisation, the value of which has so far not been sufficiently recognised by writers on economics."

Camille listened in amazement. "You advise me to turn pickpocket?" he burst out at last.

"You put it somewhat harshly," said the man, and the twitching at the mouth developed into a smile of

amusement; "but under the circumstances it would be the best way of attaining your object. It is, of course, a little risky; but then the risk is as great for the capitalists as for you. The only difficulty is that the time of the year is not very auspicious. It is getting cold, and in winter people go about with their hands in their pockets."

Camille caught the smile on the speaker's face, and a light dawned upon him. "You are jesting," he cried.

"No, I am ridiculing; there is no surer way of dislodging fallacies—even a gigantic one like yours; unless you want me to give my casting vote in favour of the idiot."

Camille hung his head. The man's tone was kindly; it had an honest ring. Camille was not in a mood to be eclectic in the choice of his company, and he might as well make a friend of him as of anybody else.

"In Lunette one hears very little of what goes on in the world," he said; "perhaps I am not very wise, but I would learn things quickly if I had anyone to teach me."

"Then, my dear boy, put yourself to school with Krantz, the Alsatian, at your service," and he bowed to Camille. Then he continued: "Pupil's name?"

Camille told him, as well as every other fact that went to make up his little history, concluding with his misadventure at the cabaret.

"Let me see the pieces," said Krantz. He examined them and laughed. "You have paid toll; country pigeons must expect to be plucked when first they come to town; it may happen to anyone—don't lose confidence in yourself because of it. Still, sixty francs is a pity; do you know the shop?"

"It was somewhere across the great square with the

statue in the middle—the third turning in the street leading out of it.”

“Somewhere in the moon would be as good a direction,” laughed Krantz; “it’s a lost trail. The rascal exchanged your good money for bad. Have you other resources?”

“None except these,” and Camille held up his two hands.

“H’m, very good in their way,” commented Krantz, after a critical glance.

“Could you, on security of them, advance me two sous?” asked Camille; “otherwise I must go without food.”

“Two sous? Very modest for an aspiring millionaire,” said Krantz; “let me see if I can accommodate you without overdrawing my account. My dividends have not been very regular lately.”

A lengthy search in all his pockets realised a total of forty centimes. He shook his head.

“I am not justified in making you a loan on the amount,” he said; “but if you wish to accept my hospitality, you are welcome to potluck. We may as well dine together.”

Camille looked grateful. His appetite was fast changing into ravenousness. A few minutes’ walk brought them to a baker’s shop, where Krantz invested twenty centimes in bread, and then passed on to a dairy, where he expended the rest in cheese.

“Will you take a seat?” he said, grandiosely, pointing to one of the wooden benches deposited about the streets.

They both sat down; Krantz fetched out his clasp-knife, and divided the provisions with painful conscientiousness.

Camille needed no further bidding, but set to work without another thought; otherwise he might have noticed that the bread was stale and the cheese mouldy. The main thing was that there was quantity if not quality.

"After all the world's not such a bad place to live in," remarked Krantz with his mouth full; "it's wonderful to what extent we delegate our views of life to the inner man," and he emphasised this opinion by a tremendous bite.

Camille agreed with him tacitly. He thought to himself that things looked a good deal brighter now than they had looked half an hour ago. He was no longer hungry; he felt no longer lonely and forsaken. He seemed to have cast anchor in the interminable ocean of humanity in which he had been floating, drifting, whirling, all day. His senses, and with them his hopes and optimism were coming back. And he owed it all to this stranger who had taken him on trust, who was now feeding him at the risk of himself going hungry on the morrow, and he looked at Krantz, who read his look correctly.

"Oh, it's because I liked your face," he said, as though Camille had spoken instead of having looked. "I lead a haphazard existence, and so, with all due deference to yourself, it does not matter a pin to me whom I choose for my friends. Moreover, there is the pleasure of uncertainty about it—a speculation in human nature: can you have anything more interesting?"

"In my case it will also be remunerative," said Camille warmly; "you won't regret the investment."

"That remains to be seen," said Krantz. He spoke the words at random; had he foreseen the future they would have borne for him a deeper significance.

They had finished their meal, and got up numbed and stiff with the evening chill. Camille walked along, thinking of the man at his side, and wondering how he came to be what he looked—a down-at-heels, out-at-elbows vagabond.

"May I ask you a question?" he said at length, unable to restrain his curiosity.

"How it happened?" replied Krantz, echoing Camille's query. "Very simply. I . . . . was studying at Strassbourg University—I had a difference of opinion with one of my professors; I tried to convince him that I was right by a too forcible application of proof, in a manner not consistent with academic rules. To save my *alma mater* the trouble of vindicating her outraged dignity, I severed all connection with her. I came to Paris—and that is all. Hullo, here we are."

They had come to a low-roofed little building, more shed than anything else, standing off one of the side streets near the quays.

"You must be tired," said Krantz, entering and striking a match; "my friend Ricotte sent me two sacks of fresh shavings to-day. In addition there is a truss of straw and two horsecloths. If you promise not to complain of sore bones in the morning, you may have half."



## CHAPTER THIRD

## *A STUDY IN STILL LIFE*

IT was already full day when Camille woke and sat up on his extemporised couch. He had seen the interior of the hut that had sheltered him for the night only by the glimmer of the match the previous evening, as there were no candles handy. Krantz had guided him to his sack of shavings, and he had gone off into a sound sleep without troubling himself further about anything else. By the light of day he saw how mean and dingy his lodgings were—just an ordinary four-wall composition, with a loam floor, and one or two most necessary items of furniture to complete its appointments.

Krantz was already up, crouching over an iron tripod containing a handful of lighted splinters, whereon a saucepan was simmering. He turned round as he heard Camille stirring.

"Good morning, prince," he said facetiously; "has your highness deigned to rest well during the night? Your chamberlains will be in attendance presently; in the meantime your servant, the cook, is preparing breakfast."

"What have you got there?" asked Camille, who found the last remark very much to his taste.

"Potatoes—one, two, three—ten of them—we are at the end of our stock, I regret to say; but I trust that they will go the length of our appetites."

Camille jumped up cheerily; a good night's rest, with a breakfast at the end of it—that does not happen to every man with only three counterfeit coins in his pocket.

“Does this dwelling belong to you?” he asked.

“Not to me—to my friend Ricotte; he lived here many years ago, and paid his rent to the then owner. The latter died, left no heirs, nobody troubled about the concern, and Ricotte appropriated it. But at his marriage he moved out, and now lives near the Porte St. Denis. I act for him as caretaker here—a purely honorary position, of course; but you see it has its advantages.”

Camille agreed readily. He fully saw the advantages—they had the shape and aspect of sacks of shavings to sleep on, and potatoes to eat.

“You will excuse the cloth,” said Krantz, when he had finished his preparations; “also the other usual accessories of the breakfast table—I delight in primitive habits.”

Camille would have been content to go back with him to the times before the Deluge, as long as the victuals kept them company on the journey.

And as he sat bolting his mouthfuls in quick succession he had only one anxiety: he knew that in a few hours he would feel inclined to repeat the experience, and that then he might find it more difficult to satisfy his inclinations. He could not impose himself entirely on a stranger's good nature and ride it to death. And that reminded him of his uncle. He had not intended presenting himself to him immediately—at least not before he had made an attempt or two to shift unaided; his uncle would probably think more of him if Camille showed him he would not ask for a

crutch while he thought he could stand on his own legs. But now it was different. He had no money, he had no abode, he was thrown on the bounty of a man who had hardly enough for himself. His uncle's pride would surely not permit that.

"Have you ever heard of Arsène Clairmont?" he asked suddenly.

"Have I ever heard of Napoleon?" questioned Krantz by way of answer; "there is not a ragamuffin about the Boulevards who could not point him out to you, eyes shut. What have you got to do with him?"

"So far I have had nothing to do with him; he does not know of my existence. But I want to tell him that he has at least one nephew living in this world."

Krantz looked at him with round eyes.

"Arsène Clairmont your uncle? And you are sitting here without a sou to buy salt for your potatoes? My sense of humour must be defective, my friend; I don't see the joke."

"It's no joke" said Camille seriously—"I told you my name was Clairmont."

"True, the names are identical," reflected Krantz; "but that is as much proof of relationship as that you and he are wearing a coat of the same colour. You will want more credentials than that; he is a cautious man, is your supposed uncle Clairmont."

Camille flushed a little. "Very well," he said quietly; "the question at issue is to prove the uncle-ship not so much to you as to him; and of that I have no fear. If I had his address I should set your mind at rest immediately."

"I can accommodate you," said Krantz; "number seven, Avenue des Peupliers—I have passed the house hundreds of times. If you like I shall take you there."

"By all means," said Camille gratefully. In a moment he had made himself look as respectable as was possible with the limited toilette arrangements at his disposal, and followed Krantz out.

"Here comes Ricotte," said the latter, and Camille saw a big brawny man striding towards them. The new arrival looked from Krantz to Camille.

"More protégés?" he said under his breath to Krantz; "you are making my hut a casual ward for all the riff-raff in Paris. I don't mind, but I don't think you have been much the gainer by your philanthropy. Mark my word, he will turn out like the rest."

"Hush," whispered Krantz; "he's a nephew of Arsène Clairmont."

"And I am a nephew of the Pope," returned Ricotte; "you see I am right—he starts promisingly."

"He does not look like a liar," replied Krantz; "and besides we shall soon get at the truth—he is going there now. I shall show him the way, and see that he makes his call."

"Then see you have an ambulance ready outside in case he should break any bones when they pitch him out into the street," growled Ricotte, turning into the hut. Krantz shrugged his shoulders and signed to Camille to come on; if any bones were about to be broken, they would not be his. He was going to do Camille a good turn; if the latter came to grief over it, it was his business.

"Very good fellow that Ricotte," he said, as they were going along the mud-puddled streets. "His one fault is too much pessimism. A man whom I lodged in his hut one night went away in the morning with an old pair of bellows, and ever since he has been very

distrustful about my guests. Fancy judging human nature from an old pair of bellows; there is no logic in the man."

"None whatever," agreed Camille absent-mindedly. His thoughts were fixed on the coming interview, not—he admitted to himself—without some trepidation. He felt his case was not very strong. The only claim on which he might ask his uncle's help was that of kinship; but his uncle might recognise the kinship without admitting the claim. His father had suffered years of want; he had starved in the knowledge that his brother possessed countless wealth, and yet he had never thought of asking that brother to raise one finger for his relief. It was not dogged principle that could have kept him from asking—there was no resentment, no obstinacy in his father's nature; evidently he knew the man he had to deal with, and saved himself a useless humiliation. •And now this humiliation devolved on his own self—would it indeed prove useless? And Camille stared questioninglly at the mud-reeking pavement, which stared back at him in stony unresponsiveness.

"Yes, as I was saying, and as you admitted," continued Krantz, after a slight pause, "human nature should not be judged by a pair of bellows; that is entirely insufficient for a proper deduction. The only conclusion Ricotte should have drawn from the circumstance was that the bellows were missing, and that he must get a new pair. But to make an inference from the abstracted article on the abstractor, his brothers, first cousins, and all his collateral affinities, is nothing less than a rash generalisation. Ricotte is a good glassblower, but he is no philosopher."

Krantz paused again, and shot a glance at Camille's

face. He saw, and interpreted correctly, the stolid look of despondency it wore, and set himself to remedy it. He felt uncomfortable in the presence of people who seemed miserable.

"I have carefully thought out the strict connection between mine and thine," he resumed; "it merely involves the principle of exchange. If you have something, and I have not something, there is no reason why I should not exchange the not-having for the having. Both are a state, a condition; and the blame falls not on me, who am responsible for the altered conditions, but on the other party who has not enough versatility of temperament to accommodate himself to the alteration. I am satisfied with it, and you are not; well, then, the fault is in you. Really, this is a consideration which would greatly conduce to the happiness of the human race if it were viewed in its proper light. I don't pose as a moral educator, but in this respect I am certainly a generation or two in advance of my times."

A smile broke over Camille's face as he listened to Krantz's antics of sophistry. Krantz noted the smile, and was satisfied.

It was a good distance to their destination, and Camille's head whirled with the perplexing labyrinthine tangle of crossways and branch roads through which Krantz picked his way surefooted, unerringly. Camille felt as though he were seeking the solution of a vast incomprehensible enigma of stone and mortar, cunningly wrought and inextricable. Yesterday, when he was making his way through it for the first time, it had not struck him with the full force of its bewildering confusion, because he was drifting along at random with no fixed destination, heedless

where his footsteps guided him ; but to-day he was making for a definite goal, and it seemed a super-human task to find anything or anybody one searched for in this mazy wilderness. And when Krantz stopped and said : " We have arrived," Camille gave a little gasp of incredulous surprise.

" Are you sure it is here ?" he asked. " Isn't it a little further on ?"

" This is the house," said Krantz, uncompromisingly ; " if you don't believe me, you need only ring the bell and ask."

Camille gazed dubiously at the broad staircase of stone that led to the portal, and looked so forbiddingly stately.

" Won't you come in with me ?" he asked.

" By no means," replied Krantz, hastily ; " your uncle might not like to make too many new acquaintances at one time ; I'll wait for you outside."

Camille mounted the steps hesitatingly. During the ascent he found himself getting decidedly knock-kneed, and there was an awkward fulness in his throat to which he was not accustomed. But he felt Krantz's eyes watching him, and that determined him to make a valorous tug at the bell-wire.

The flunkey who opened looked at him from top to toe.

" You are too late," he said ; " yesterday was the time for application. M. Clairmont has all the stable-boys he requires."

Camille looked puzzled. " I am not a stable-boy," he answered ; " I am a nephew of M. Clairmont. Can I see him ?"

" I never heard that M. Clairmont had any relatives," reflected the servant ; " at least, none of them have

ever come to this house. So it is just possible you are his nephew; however, we'll leave that for him to decide. Come in and wait."

Camille entered the hall, and thought he was walking on clouds, but it was only the beautiful long-haired bear-rug that felt so soft. He looked at it and at his muddy boots, and felt very much inclined to take them off.

After a moment or two the man re-appeared, and signed Camille to follow him. Camille clambered up the escalier, stumbling and slipping over the smooth polished stairs of oak, and dreading to touch the gleaming balustrade lest he should tarnish some of the gold. The servant opened a door and pushed Camille into an apartment. Wonderingly he gazed round him. There was no one to be seen. The room was a little forest of plants that reached the ceiling. There were patches of leopard-skin on the floor; hangings of dark velvet embroidery clothed the walls. There were chairs, tables, mirror-frames of solid ebony, and over all lay an air of solemn magnificence.

Camille was frightened at the grandeur and the silence, and looked furtively into the corners and niches. Suddenly a screen swung round on hinges the further end of the room, and behind it he saw two men lounging indolently in luxurious armchairs. One was elderly, the other young—father and son evidently.

"What have you to say?" asked the elder, looking at Camille fixedly. Camille did not like the look, nor did he like the tone; the look came from cold, steel-glittering eyes, and the tone was harsh and grating, as though the words were jerked out against the speaker's wish. Camille's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.



"What have you to say?" came the question again, this time more harsh and grating in its impatience.

"I have come to bring you my father's compliments," Camille at last found voice to say.

"What do you mean?"

"I have just arrived in Paris, and my father—your brother Eugene—said I was to present myself to you."

"Very good—you have done so. What now?" was the reply.

"I am a stranger," continued Camille, with an effort. "I have no means, no prospects, and people say you are very rich."

"And what has that to do with you, pray?"

"Father thought you might help me to start my career in life."

"He thought? Why should he think so?" went on the catechiser.

"If for no other reason, you were to do it for the sake of my mother, whom you knew very well."

A greenish look crept over the man's sallow face.

"Apparently this is your cousin," he said inconsequently, turning to the young man who had been listening to the somewhat one-sided dialogue with a vacant expression. Camille thought it would be hard for him to look anything but vacant with his thin lips, sand-coloured hair, and bloodless complexion.

"How very interesting," drawled the young man; "a most creditable connection. If anything, our social status is now assured." •

The older man was glaring at Camille.

"What shall I do to help you?" he asked, coldly.

"I don't know," replied Camille, with a quaver; "you might find me a situation in some business-house."

"Oh no," broke in the young man, "we can't do that. How do we know whether you are honest? You might compromise us."

Camille flushed to the roots of his hair.

"No, I can't do that," echoed the old man. "I think it is best you should go home to your village and take your father's compliments back to him; I can do without them very comfortably."

"But consider," cried Camille, with an appealing glance at the two, "what am I to do? I am helpless and destitute in this great city. After all, we are blood relations."

"That is one of the accidents for which we are not responsible," sneered the young man.

"Your father should have known me better than to send you here," said the other. "I may forget, but I never forgive—and you have reminded me. Had you come as a stranger, you might have had something to hope for; but as the son of my brother . . ." He broke off and shrugged his shoulders expressively.

Camille heard the cold, cruel words with a sinking at his heart. Could they indeed be so merciless? Would they indeed send him away, knowing that it was in their power to help him by the lifting of their hand? Slowly and dejectedly he turned and went towards the door.

"Wait a minute," the old man called after him, and Camille stopped, with a flash of joy on his face.

"Take this, it will pay for your journey home." And hurtling through the air came a gold piece, and fell at Camille's feet.

He looked at it a second, dazed and stunned, and then a wave of passion swept through his heart. With a low, inarticulate cry, he stamped upon the coin again

and again, grinding it under his heel. He had borne their contempt, their unnatural hardness, more with pain than with anger, but this deliberate insult let loose in him all the untamed feelings of the rock-dwelling, moor-haunting half-savage he was. White to his lips, and with clenched fists, he turned to resent the affront.

"Keep your distance! Don't touch me!" shrieked his cousin.

Camille measured the cowering figure with a glance of infinite disdain, and then fixed his eyes on his uncle, who stood with his hand on the bell-rope.

"Because of your cursed love for my mother, you hate my father," he said, half-choking over the words. "My mother in heaven will tell the good God to curse you, and to make your pitiless heart to break till you will die of the agony."

With a bound he dashed through the open door and down the long staircase. At the bottom a peal of laughter struck his ears—a hollow laugh, like that of men who reassure themselves after a groundless fright. And that goaded him out into the street, and once free, he ran on blindly, unthinkingly, only to run the sound of it out of his ears. But the faster he ran, the faster it followed him, until it was no vague, impersonal thing, but a malignant fiend that darted at him with murderous, strangling fingers. Now they seemed to have clutched him, and he leapt round with a cry of terror at the sudden touch, only to gaze at Krantz, who stood grabbing him by the nape of his neck, his face red and heated, and his chest working like iron machinery at high tension.

"By all the virtues of my grandmother, whom I never knew," he puffed, convulsively keeping his hold

on Camille to stop him from further flight, "this is the tightest race I ever ran—worse than when I dodged the Strassbourg proctors; had I not come up to you this instant, I should have dropped without power to take another step. Why, man, you rushed away as if all the devil's outriders were whipping you on. Don't look so frightened; I won't eat you."

He loosed his grasp of Camille, but slowly and warily, so as to resume it betimes if occasion required.

Camille answered nothing, but walked on quietly, his head hanging, heaving and quivering in every muscle.

"It's just as well there were not too many people in the neighbourhood," resumed Krantz, wiping his face, "or you might have enjoyed the experience of being hounded by a pack of amateur thief-hunters—in the name of a dog, I do believe my legs are out of joint."

And Krantz stopped and solicitously patted his understandings from the hip to the ankle. The reason for his tremendous exertion was very simple. When he had seen Camille tear out of the house, he had naturally thought there was something wrong with this mode of making one's exit. So he had waited two minutes on the spot to see if there would be pursuit by the servants, which of course, meant that Camille had taken something more than his departure. But everything had remained quiet, and in the meantime Camille was nearly out of sight, and so Krantz had to put his best foot forward.

Camille walked on, without apparently noticing his companion's presence. Krantz was not offended at this indifference to the possible injuries he might

have sustained, but walked on likewise, possessing his soul in patience. He knew a little of human nature, and he knew that if one happens to be in company of a man who has a whole volcano of suppressed emotion struggling inside him, it is just as well to let it discharge itself in its own good time, and not to act as tapster, lest the red hot flood should burn one's busybody fingers. And that he was right, he had an immediate opportunity of convincing himself. Camille lifted his head, stared rigidly in front of him, and his lips uttered sounds. Krantz pricked up his ears, and prepared to be rewarded for his long-suffering patience.

"Curses on them—the two of them," he heard Camille mutter. "God, is there no charity in the world? Did they not see I was wretched enough to draw pity from a stone?"

"Yes, you are certainly not in an enviable state," commented Krantz, as though Camille's half-uttered self-communings were merely incidents of their conversation; "so they have ill-treated you?"

"Ill-treated?" broke out Camille, "they have tortured me, stabbed me, spat upon me. I came to ask them for ever so little—something it was not worth their while refusing."

"And they refused it? Most unamiable connections, as far as I can judge," remarked Krantz, looking sideways at Camille.

He was convinced of one thing—that Camille had not taken him a fool's errand; that he had gone in all good faith, believing he had something to go for, and that he had been disappointed. This ingenious country lad was not a histrionic prodigy, and therefore his disappointment was genuine.

Consequently Krantz found himself in the position of host, guide, and comforter to a millionaire's nephew—hungry, homeless, hopeless, like himself, only more so—a most unique occurrence, and one which would not fail to supply him with a continuous flow of optimistic reflections. At any rate, it consoled him for the want of a myriad-moneyed uncle, a possession with which he had always associated countless possibilities.

Camille had again fallen into a mood of taciturn resentment. Krantz saw it with displeasure. He would have liked him to unload himself once for all and to have a clear atmosphere between the two, because, as they would probably remain in company for some time longer, the lad's irritation might flash from the cloud of discontent in his heart, and strike in the wrong direction—possibly in the direction of Krantz himself. It was strange: this wide-world orphan had been rejected by his gold-reeking kinsman and had been adopted by a vagabond pauper—outcast to outcast; was not that the natural order of things? And so Krantz determined, purely from self-convenience, to prevent Camille from becoming a sulky grumbler. He thought for a minute and found his plan. Camille had gradually assumed a more systematic way of locomotion, and followed Krantz with an obedience, the real motive of which was a total unconcern of coming events.

"Come on, let me show you the sights of the town," said Krantz. "They were approaching the river, just where Notre Dame looks down with its monster-shaped gargoyles, heavy and stupefied by their thousand years of memories.

Camille glanced at them, and Krantz followed his

glance. "I have often wondered," said he, "if they were born so ugly, or only became so from witnessing so many ugly sights."

Camille almost smiled at the quaint notion. "Are we going in there?" he asked, pointing to the open church door.

"I don't see any necessity; besides I haven't felt at home in these places for some time—what is their use if they don't let you sleep in them at nights?"

Camille felt sorry; he would have liked to spend an hour in there. It looked so grand and solemn inside—it must almost be impossible to feel wretched within its walls. So he followed Krantz reluctantly as he skirted the cathedral, and made his way across the road to a mean, insignificant building, before which they stopped. People went in and out, looking sober and serious, and even those who passed it without pausing cast a hurried sidelong glance through the open doorways, and went on as if a sudden shadow had fallen over their lives. It was the Morgue.

Camille felt uncomfortable.

"What is this place?" he asked.

"It's the Asylum for lost souls and found bodies," answered Krantz mysteriously; "come and have a look at them." •

They made their way to where a thin, evershifting line of spectators were looking through broad sheets of glass.

Camille looked too, and saw five or six waxwork figures of men and women reclining on tressels, looking wonderfully human, and playing at being dead.

"A museum of some sort," he thought to himself; "and how well imitated—these townspeople are very clever to be able to do such things; one would not see this in our village if he lived to be a hundred."

And so he passed from one to the other, with Krantz constantly at his elbow, and the longer he looked, the stronger became the fascination that riveted his eyes to the sight. The figures seemed so wan and cold and shrunken, so pitifully small, with a dim, far-off suggestion of unhuman horror about them; and the people who stared at them kept so quiet, and went about in tip-toe tongue-tied solicitude, as if they were in a churchyard.

And suddenly an inkling of the dread reality flashed across Camille's mind, and he clutched hold of Krantz, with a terror-stricken whisper.

"In the name of heaven—what are these?"

"God knows what they are" replied Krantz; "their friends could probably tell you what they were. They don't look pretty, do they?" and he threw a critical glance at the corpses; "even that young woman in the corner does not look prepossessing, for all her finery. They haven't closed her mouth—she must have died laughing. Oh yes, they are all dead, stone dead, and this is the Morgue, the city mortuary. Let us go, you have had enough of it, I can see."

Camille did not gainsay him—another minute and he must faint. But as they walked out and on, Krantz saw the look of peace and resignation on his face, and knew that he had effected his purpose. He was sure now that Camille would not vent the grudge he owed the world either on his companion or—what Krantz had been very much afraid of, and what has often happened under the circumstances—on himself.

"A capital distraction for the melancholy," he thought, with a chuckle; "nothing to give those weary of life such a zest for the article as a peep behind the scenes. I am sure that young musician



I met four years ago would be fine dust by now if I had not given him this same object-lesson. 'What? Will they make frozen meat of me like that? I'll hold on a little longer then, he said.' And he held on, and now rides in a carriage and doesn't know me. Bah, as Ricotte says, they are all ungrateful; I suppose this one will be the same."

"Let's get back to the hut, and hold a council of war about our dinner," he said aloud, as though he were bringing his train of thought to a natural conclusion.

"By all means," assented Camille, cheerfully. "I want to make quite sure that I am not dead, and lying behind a glass case at the Morgue."

## CHAPTER FOURTH

## *FIFINE AND THE FEAST OF FLOWERS*

A SHARP walk of ten minutes brought Krantz and Camille to their destination.

"Hullo, the door's shut, and Ricotte has gone off with the key," said Krantz. "Now we must hang about outside till he comes back." His face became long, and he planted himself against the door with a thud. For echo, there was a voice like a tinkle of silver from inside.

"Who's there?" it said. "Is that you, Krantz?"

"It is, little one," replied Krantz, brightening up.

"Father left a few tools here, and he told me to bolt and bar the door, and let no one in but you, Krantz—he doesn't want them stolen like his bellows," continued the voice, in sudden jerks, significant of the toil incidental to unfastening the aforementioned bolts and bars.

"Come in," said the owner of the voice, swinging open the door, "and be careful——"

There was a stop, and the speaker looked indignantly at Krantz.

"You've told a lie," came forth in severe accusation.

"Why, I haven't said anything," replied Krantz, aghast.

"I asked you if it was you, and you said yes."

"But it is I."

"No, it isn't—it's you and somebody else," said the little girl, pointing angrily to Camille; "and somebody else can't come in, that's certain."

She stationed herself firmly in the doorway, which she had kept ajar since she caught sight of Camille.

"Nonsense," said Krantz, in vexed amusement, "the gentleman is a friend of mine, and besides your father knows him."

"I can't help that," she said, resolutely; "I have my orders, and I won't break them for fifty friends of yours."

"She is quite right, Krantz," said Camille, a little sadly. "I have no business here—I am only an intruder at the best. I shall look about and see what I can do for myself. Good-bye; when I want to see you, I shall call for you here."

He took Krantz's hand, pressed it warmly, and turned slowly to go.

"What does he mean?" asked the little *châtelaine*, somewhat taken aback at the ease with which she was allowed to assent her authority; "where is he going to?"

"Nowhere," replied Krantz sullenly, looking after Camille, and ready for a second chase the moment he was likely to pass out of sight.

"Why nowhere?" persisted little Curiosity.

"Because he has nowhere to go to," said Krantz, with a great effort to look savage. "Because he is a stranger, without a sou in his pocket, and because you so kindly slam the door in his face. Of course, you are mistress here."

The girl stepped out quickly.

"Hey, you there!" she shouted, forming a speaking-trumpet with her hands.

Camille heard her, and, turning round, paused irresolutely; she was beckoning to him to come back. A gesture of Krantz decided him, and with a few hasty strides he was again at their side.

"You can come in now," said the hostess graciously. "I only wanted to see if you would go away quietly."

"Isn't that breaking your orders?" asked Camille earnestly.

"Oh, you can come in on my responsibility—not because you are a friend of Krantz," she explained, "and that makes a difference, don't you see?"

She paused in order to wait till the plausibility of the excuse had come home to her listener.

"Never mind thinking so hard about it," she went on impatiently, as she saw Camille contracting his eyebrows in a desperate attempt at comprehending. She was getting afraid there might be some hole in her argument.

"At any rate, we might go in first, and wrangle about it afterwards," suggested Krantz. His inspiration for the suggestion was a certain nipping which he felt in the tips of his fingers and toes, not to mention his knee-joints; he had caught a glimpse of the little charcoal fire on the tripod-improvisation blinking invitingly from inside.

"Mind," screamed the girl, clutching at the two men as they stepped into the room, "or you'll tread on them with your heavy dirty boots."

The dingy little hut looked as if some one had been scattering handfuls of radiant splendour upon its floor. On closer inspection, however, one saw it was only strings and bunches of autumn flowers ranged about in harmonious confusion—nothing very ambitious, chrysanthemums and early winter roses, the posthumous

children of the summer, when Mother Earth is tired of travail, and seems to lose delight in her offspring.

"They are getting harder to find day by day," complained the girl; "scarcely any are left in the parks, and one can't go down the river into the fields every morning—it's horrid in winter." And she emphasised the horror with a pout.

Krantz stooped and picked up a knot of ox-eye daisies bound up with evergreens.

"There you are—meddling with the little dears," she cried, snatching it gingerly out of his hands. "They don't want to be worried by your clumsy fingers. You grab them as if you were going to choke the life out of them, poor little things." She pressed the nosegay to her bosom, stroking and fondling it almost tearfully, and looking at Krantz with reproachful eyes.

"I meant no harm to them," apologised Krantz, edging back.

"Now, go and sit far away, over there," and she pointed to a corner, "and watch me making up the bouquets; you may talk, but you mustn't touch anything. The verger at the Madeleine told me there was to be a big funeral there this afternoon, and that I should be able to sell ever so many."

She seated herself complacently on the little stool, and her fingers became very busy. Krantz was still abashed by his rebuff, and Camille gazed wonderingly at the little creature that looked so like an angel, and could talk so like a vixen.

She felt his gaze, and lifted her eyes slowly to his.

"Decidedly," thought Camille, "she does look like an angel." And this reflection seemed to wash away his memory of her former uncereemonious behaviour.

"Who are you?" she asked abruptly.

Camille identified himself.

"A very nice name, Camille," she said, nodding approvingly; "is it your real one?"

"Of course it is," said Camille, somewhat astonished; "all honest people have only one name by which they go without being ashamed."

She looked pensive.

"Then I suppose I am not honest," she declared at last, petulantly.

"Why not?" asked Camille.

"Because I like to be called Fifine, and my real name is Arethuse—a horrid, cruel name, isn't it?"

"I don't think it's so horrid," said Camille, consolingly. "As far as I remember, that is what they called, in olden times, one of the beautiful river fairies, with shining white skin and golden hair—just like yours."

"Have I got white skin and golden hair?" she asked, with a perplexed look.

"Why, certainly," affirmed Camille.

"And does that make people stared at?"

"Of course it does," said Camille, his voice pregnant with conviction.

She turned with a sudden gesture of resentment to Krantz, who had been listening patiently.

"Why did you never tell me that?" she cried.

"What was I to tell you?" asked Krantz, with a flutter of apprehension.

"That I have a golden skin—I mean golden hair and a white skin," she replied, tripping over her words in her vehemence.

"Goodness me, why should I? What difference does it make?"

"It makes a great deal of difference. It would have saved me from feeling uncomfortable each time I go out. Hardly anyone passes my flower-stand without looking at me, and making remarks to the people they are with; and then I think it's because my clothes are shabby, or my face is not clean, or because I have done something wicked. And it's only because of this wretched skin and hair of mine. All right, they won't stare much longer; off it comes—snip, snip—as soon as I can find a pair of scissors; and then I am going to ask the joiner next door to us for some mahogany paint to rub on my cheeks. I won't be stared at!—I won't!" And she stamped her foot by way of a climax.

"You had better not do anything of the sort," said Camille, quietly, apparently unimpressed by this volcanic eruption.

"I should just like to know what you have to say in this, you—you stranger!" cried Fifine, looking with indignant eyes at the bold intervener.

"You had better not," repeated the latter without any trace of being annihilated by the terrible affront just hurled at him. "Do you earn much money by selling flowers?"

"Oh, a great deal," she answered, cowed by his calmness; "at least, twice as much as any of the other girls on my beat—but then, they are all so ugly. There's Lisette, who has a hunchback, and a mouth like the crevice of a letter-box; and Françoise, whose voice sounds like the creaking of a dray-cart as she cries, 'Beautiful flowers, two sous the bunch!' I never sell mine for less than three."

"Well, if you are going to make yourself ugly, what do you think will happen?" asked Camille with a smile.

Fifine considered for a moment; then it flashed on her. "Oh!" she exclaimed, rounding her mouth and letting the sound whiz slowly away. She had acquired the first lesson in the science of aesthetics: the beautiful is beautiful by harmony, not by contrast. Of course, she did not put it in such a concise form, but she felt vaguely that her competitors' wares did not gain in attraction by the unprepossessing looks of their vendors. Decidedly, she would take this impudent stranger's advice, and not clip her curls nor dye herself a gipsy—no, she would rather be stared at, and sell her flowers at three sous the bunch.

Feeling it was through the stranger's help that she had arrived at this heroic resolution, she thought it fair to treat him a little more considerately.

"Selling nosegays is a hateful business," she said, looking sweetly at Camille, and deftly plucking, sorting and twining her posies into shape. "I once read a story of a mother who sold her little children because she had no bed and no food for them—it was so sad; I cried big, big tears all the time I was reading. Well, I often feel what the mother in the story felt, and if it were not for all the strange people round me in the streets, I should cry when I give my flowers away. But what can I do? If I were to keep them where we live, near the Porte St. Denis, they would die, because it's close and stuffy there, and there is no light and air to feed them with. But I always kiss them goodbye," she prattled on; "that is my blessing to them. And if they are taken away by people who have hard faces, and cold cruel eyes, I always kiss them twice; and that is meant for two blessings, because I know they will need them. Oh, it's a hateful business, unless one has a heart of stone."



"I can't understand people's idea on the subject; picking flowers is to me almost as bad as snatching fledglings," observed Krantz sanctimoniously from his corner, wishing at the same time that Providence might put it in his way to perpetrate the latter crime—even if the result were only a fat duckling. This talk about flowers, even though it came from Fifine, was very tedious. If they had only been colewort or cabbages instead!

"What do you do for a living?" enquired Fifine of Camille.

"Nothing as yet."

"What can you do?"

Camille scratched his ear and wondered how it was he had not asked himself the question before. Coming thus from the mouth of a stranger it seemed doubly hard to answer.

He shook his head. "Nothing in particular," he admitted.

"That's bad," she said gravely; "then why did you come here at all?"

"Father said I was to go and make a fortune." He bit his tongue, ashamed and confused, as he caught Krantz's eye, and remembered how he had made merry at the idea yesterday. But the phrase was ringing in his head, and escaped him unawares.

"And when you are rich you will go about with your nose in the air, and call everybody '*canaille*'—that's what all rich people do," said Fifine, looking displeased.

"Oh no, I wouldn't," protested Camille, "I should . . ."

"Well, in any case—it's wrong to have a lot of money, so father says," she cut him short. "If you had, I think I should dislike you very much."

"There, there," said Krantz, "its no use quarrelling about it, because he hasn't got it yet—not by a long way. Other people have tried before him, and have not succeeded. Anyhow, it's a neck-breaking hobby for a man who doesn't know his way about things."

"But then he may succeed without trying," persisted Fifine. "Perhaps one of those stars I have seen leaping from the sky when the night is fine may fall bang! right at his feet, and then he would only have to stoop and pick up the pieces of diamond it's made of; at least so my story-book says. One fell last week, and it must be lying somewhere on the church roof. If I cared about it, and had a ladder long enough, I would go and fetch it."

"What now if I went up for it?" smiled Camille; "you see, then I need not wait till my own star falls."

"You would only find it bits of glass," presaged the little mouth, drawing itself into a severe pucker, "because you took what was not yours to take, and the bits of glass will stick in your fingers, and smart awfully."

Camille looked wonderingly at the earnest little face.

"I also have read that story," he said, partly to humour her fancy, partly because he was struck with the truth of the conceit; "but in my book it said that the glass splinters stick inside one's heart, and then people say they feel remorse or pricks of conscience."

"Inside one's heart!" echoed Fifine with a sympathetic shudder. "That must be ever so much more painful."

"Of course it is; at first it is only a tickle, and with some it never gets beyond that. But later on it is excruciating, and it comes on worst when one is all alone."

"Just when no one is near to help them, I suppose. That's how it always is. If I got the toothache, it only hurts half as much when somebody is by to hear me cry with the pain. But I have never had bits of glass inside me—have you?"

Camille shook his head; but he thought it must be nice to be an ostrich, for then he could have lived on broken glass and crockery, of which there is always a plentiful supply to be had for the mere asking. It was pleasant to sit there and watch the little fingers twinkling in and out of the many-hued fabrics they were weaving, and the red lips that made music without song, and the great eyes that were never still, and seemed busier than hands or lips. However, the ostrich idea was not bad either, and Camille looked anxiously towards Krantz to see if he made any sign of continuing his foraging expedition of the morning. But Krantz sat on with his hands in his pockets as if he never meant to take them out again.

"You look tired—tired of me, I suppose," said Fifine turning to Camille; "but never mind, I am done now, and you can look after father's tools till he comes back, while you talk about dogs and tobacco and soldiers, and all the horrid things men like to talk about. If I don't go soon, I won't get a good stand."

She got up and shook the loose flowers from her lap.

"You can have these—Camille;" the name came shyly, and then she stepped daintily over the improvised carpet to avoid treading on the designs. Then going up to the little brazier she made a scoop of her hands, dipped them into the smouldering heat, and threw it over her face and neck as she meant it to cling there.

"It's very cold standing still in the streets," she

explained; "that's why I give myself a fire-bath before going out, but it doesn't last long. I haven't got a stove; Françoise has one, but she is awfully stingy, and won't let anyone touch it. Never mind, I never have such a blue nose as she has for all her stove and being stingy. Good-bye, Camille; I shall see you again, won't I?"

She took up her basket, and without awaiting his answer, stepped to the door.

"No good-bye for me?" said Krantz, looking grieved and reproachful.

"Camille can let you have half of his," she laughed, saucily.

The door shut, and both men listened to her trip, trip, as it died away into the distance, with a sudden feeling of loneliness.

"Yes, that is Fifine," said Krantz at last, as though he had made a great discovery.

"Where did she get those eyes from—and that hair?" asked Camille, almost awe-stricken.

"Imported from across the Rhine," said Krantz; "a German girl nursed one of Napoleon's heroes well again after Austerlitz, and out of gratitude he brought her over here to beautiful France. Fifine is her great-granddaughter."

And then Krantz turned and gazed thoughtfully at the discarded flower-litter. It looked fresh, and smelt very sweet. Slowly he stooped, and gathering a handful, examined them carefully.

Camille watched him with impatience; was Krantz going to be sentimental—was he going to apostrophise them, and burst into poetry? And that on an empty stomach? The man must be either a miracle or a maniac.

And then he was mystified still further.

"Neither colewort nor cabbage," he heard Krantz mutter ; " but what is the use of a luxuriant imagination and a healthy appetite ? "

With that Krantz knelt down and began picking among the *débris*, collecting the petals and throwing away the stems, and depositing the former in the pewter basin. Then he filled it with water, and rinsed them thoroughly.

Camille sat down with a sigh of resignation. After all, what could he say or do ? The man was at home here, and could play the fool if he liked. So why should he not pour vinegar over the flowers, and sprinkle them with salt and pepper, and stir them up with the wooden ladle just as he chose ? He had no right to stop him ; to tell him, " I am hungry—feed me ! " And how long was he going to be subjected to this chance existence, where his bed and board, his heart and his hopes, were random things ? Surely his father was right—there is no happiness without wealth, and this was not the way to it, this idle playing at the game of pot-luck. One may trust to Providence to become a king, or a landed proprietor, or a great criminal ; but to look to her merely for a meal was an insult to her omnipotence. She had the elephant's trunk that lifts up anvils, but not the little finger that picks up a straw. She does not concern herself with trifles—men in their infinite littleness may work for those themselves.

Camille rose to go.

"That's right," said Krantz, cheerily ; " come to table ; dinner is ready."

He drew up two boxes to serve for seats, set two tin platters on the table, and dealt out the contents of the bowl.

"Perhaps not what you are used to, my boy," he said, after the first spoonful; "but one soon gets accustomed to good things. Even a dog eats cake when there are no bones."

Camille hesitated; he had heard of people eating shoe leather at a pinch. Well, perhaps this was better than shoe leather; it was certainly more romantic. He tasted the stew, tasted again, and went on eating.

"If Fifine knew to what a bad end her poor flowers have come," laughed Krantz, "she would call us ogres and cannibals, and scratch our eyes out. She is terrible, is little Fifine."

He rolled up his sleeve.

"Look where she bit me because I laughed at her for falling in the mud; but she bites very prettily."

Camille listened only with half an ear; his thoughts were elsewhere.

"I must find something to do," he said, gloomily; "I have nothing to expect from my—from any one."

Krantz knew what he meant by the substitution.

"And you don't want flowers for dinner every day," he added. "Very well; I shall talk it over with Ricotte—here he is."

Ricotte it was.

"Why, here you are again," he said, catching sight of Camille. "How is the uncle? Did he let you roll on his money-bags?"

Camille flushed to the roots of his hair. Krantz made a warning gesture.

"Have some of this mess, Ricotte?" he asked, helping himself to a second edition.

"What is it?"

"My own idea; it's not yet in the cookery books,

but it goes down well just the same—pickled chrysanthemums, in fact.”

Ricotte guffawed loud and long.

“Pickled thunderstorms! Why, Krantz, if you were put in the hottest furnace of hell they wouldn’t singe a hair of yours. But this won’t do, you rogues; this isn’t a cattle stall, although you may be grass-eating oxen. Here’s money—get yourselves a sausage.”

Krantz took the money and went; Camille stopped behind.

“It’s very kind of you,” he began to Ricotte.

Ricotte waved him off.

“I have nothing to do with you—you belong to Krantz. Besides, I am not giving anything; I am only repaying. I owe him a little account.”

Later on Camille learnt the nature of Ricotte’s debt to Krantz. Soon after the latter’s arrival in Paris the two fell in with one another, and swore brotherhood and friendship. The onus of this fell largely on Ricotte, who shared with Krantz his board, bed, and clothes. Krantz earned little or nothing—he had no talent in that direction. He had also no pride, and so it came natural to him to be dependent on another’s bounty. But when he had an opportunity of retaliating he rose to it all his height. And that arrived about a year after Ricotte had got married. Just about that time, too, he did something in the political line which he ought not to have done, and the myrmidons of the law came and threw him in prison, although he was urgently wanted at home to look after his wife. Then Krantz saw his chance. Quickly he gathered together in his mind all he had learnt at Strassbourg, got up his case speciously, and boldly stated that he himself had done the something in the political line.

He insisted so earnestly, and showed such undeniable proofs of being the real culprit, that the myrmidons of the law bit their lips in vexation at the absurd mistake they had apparently made, and put Krantz in Ricotte's place. However, on account of his youth, and because he had confessed of his own accord, his sentence was three years instead of the statutory five.

Krantz never could make up his mind whether he had acted so magnanimously out of gratitude, or out of sheer indifference at being kept by public charity instead of private. But when Ricotte thanked him, he replied: "It struck me that I had not made you or your wife a wedding present, and so, though somewhat late, I make you a present of each other. I am sorry, however, I shall not be able to attend the christening."

And when Camille heard the tale, he thought that Krantz had deserved his sausage.



## CHAPTER FIFTH

## *MILLIONS IN EMBRYO*

"**I** THINK I have found you something to do, youngster," said Ricotte next morning, on coming to the hut where Camille, as arranged, had again spent the night.

Camille's eyes lit up with joy.

"At last—and so soon," he thought to himself.

"Do you like meddling with books and such things?" asked Ricotte.

"More than anything else," was the eager reply.

"Then you will do," said Ricotte. "Come along—we haven't far to go. You have had breakfast, I can see."

"Yes," answered Camille with a warm look at Krantz. The latter had managed to stretch the supplies received from Ricotte the day before to the length of three meals.

"Shall I come with you?" asked Krantz.

"Perhaps it's just as well you did not," observed Ricotte with a smile; "we are going to Mother Fluquette."

"Take a thousand curses to her for my blessing, the old cat!" said Krantz venomously.

"All right," laughed Ricotte; "she swears to this day that you came to her one morning to buy a *Figaro*, and paid for it with a hundred-sou-piece

you took from her counter; she did not find it out till you were gone with the change."

"I should prosecute her for defamation, only that my reputation can bear the stain," said Krantz. "Is that all you can do for him, poor fellow?" he continued, under his breath.

Ricotte shrugged his shoulders.

"I have taken some trouble in the matter," he said, in the same tone; "this is the only thing that has turned up. But he must not be particular at the start. You know when I first married and became respectable, I worked as scavenger for three months."

Camille followed him through the door.

"Cheer up, my boy!" said Krantz, holding his hand; "you will never get lost so long as you have Krantz and the devil to look after you. And don't forget—for the present these are your lodgings. They are not luxurious, but as they don't belong to me, I have less compunction in offering them to you. Au revoir."

Ricotte had gone on in front, and Camille soon caught him up. They kept along the quays, and the lad looked longingly at the interminable rows of books that lined the parapets. He wondered what his connection with them would be.

"Here we are," exclaimed Ricotte at length.

Camille saw nothing but a narrow pentagonal booth, covered with enamelled placards and surmounted by a conical dome.

"This is the shop," repeated Ricotte, stepping round to the entrance side.

"Good morning, Madame Fluquette—my compliments to you. How is your precious health?"

The woman inside pushed away a pile of newspapers behind which she sat enthroned, and peered out.

"There, there," she cackled, with a smile that was sweetly odious, "are you also to be seen once in a hundred years, Monsieur Ricotte? And you were so good as to enquire after my health—that was nice and gentlemanly of you. Well, I have not suffered with rheumatics for some time, but now that the cold weather has come on, I feel a little stiff in the joints—not with age, God forbid, only with the cold—the cold."

"Old age, Madame!" said Ricotte, trying to keep a straight face. "What nonsense! One wants the eyes of a hawk to notice the least little crow's-foot on you. Who would think you had thirty-five years on your shoulders!"

"Thirty-six, if you please, Monsieur; I like to be scrupulously exact in all matters. But, thank Heaven, with a good digestion, a pious heart, and a little, just a little, attention to one's looks—I hate vanity above all things—one manages to preserve oneself in the image of the good God who made us; and that despite the tribulations that come upon one. Ah, Monsieur," she gabbled on, with a sigh that ran a pig's grunt close, "you will never know what it is to bury two dear good husbands, one after the other, of course; to have the warm, living heart in your bosom plunged twice into the cold, dead grave. But, thanks to the powers of good, it has come right again. It still beats with all its former vigour, all its natural affections live unquenched; it still can feel deeply—ah, so deeply, Monsieur Ricotte!"

Ricotte had been a widower for years.

"It is very sad," he remarked grimly.

"But God takes with one hand and gives with the other," she resumed, rather disappointed with Ricotte's

stone-wall look. "My husbands had both their little economies, which devolved on me. It seems the fact is not generally known in the neighbourhood."

"I heard a rumour to that effect," murmured Ricotte. He might also have told her of another rumour which said that she had made her husbands work like pack-horses, and had sent them to premature graves on a starvation diet, and no one felt uncharitable enough to complete the trinity of Madame's matrimonial bereavements. But he did not say so; it was just as well to keep on good terms with the lady for the purpose in hand.

"The wine-merchant at the corner of your street told me yesterday you were looking for an assistant," he said instead.

"Quite true. I have come to think that a woman, who can live on her dividends," and she paused a moment to give her statement time to come home to her listener—"who can live on her dividends, as I said, degrades herself by serving all alone in her shop. Don't you think so, Monsieur?"

"It is certainly a degradation; but you do it so gracefully that . . ."

"Flatterer!" she simpered, tapping him playfully on the arm with her fat mittened fingers, and Ricotte looked down involuntarily if they had not left a grease-spot on his coat. "Still, what can one do? I have had several applications, and the impudent rascals ask—how much do you think? Two francs a day! That is what we are coming to with these new-fangled notions about the nobility of labour. Have I not always said it? The proletariat is ruining the country."

There was a curious smile on Ricotte's face at the

words, a smile, which Camille, who was listening to the conversation at a distance, came to interpret by the light of his subsequent knowledge of Ricotte.

"Ruining the country?" echoed the latter. "True, by their lack of self-respect. Two francs a day shows a decay in the national pride; no wonder that you, Madame, as a patriot, resent it."

"But two francs is daylight robbery—is extortion," she screamed; "you mistake my meaning, Monsieur—I cannot afford more than one."

Ricotte forebore to ask how this was consistent with the above-hinted possession of untold capital; what was her capital to him?

"Then I have your man," he said. "Come here, Camille."

"Who — where — what is he?" asked Madame, eagerly, craning her neck, or what she called so, round the corner.

Camille came up close at Ricotte's bidding.

"He is a protégé of mine," explained Ricotte; "he is a stranger in Paris, and, therefore, I should like to know him safe in the hands of an upright, God-fearing Christian like you, Madame."

Madame examined Camille sharply, with a bold, curious look in her leaden eyes that made him feel uncomfortable.

"And you can vouch for his good behaviour, Monsieur?"

"Perfectly," replied Ricotte. He knew as much about Camille as about the Zend Avesta; but what did it matter if Camille stole the till, or set the booth on fire, or cut the hag's throat?

"I suppose he would not take less than a franc a day?" she insinuated.

"Not on any account—he swore it to his dying grandfather." Ricotte thought that a good touch; it implied an intimate cognisance of Camille's family into dim generations; and, besides, a grandfather's ghost always comes in handy to frighten people with.

"Very well, then, we shall consider it settled," said Madame, trying to conceal her satisfaction at the bargain; "but mind, Monsieur, it is a thing I should not have done for anyone but you."

"I am much obliged, and—good-morning," said Ricotte, curtly.

"There, how you run away," shouted Madame after him; "you won't even wait for my invitation to a glass of absinthe at my house. Any evening after business hours."

"Thanks, I shall do myself the pleasure," replied Ricotte, across his shoulder. In his eagerness to get away he had forgotten Camille.

"You must not stand there staring after people like a lost sheep," said Madame to Camille, who was looking disconsolately at the retreating Ricotte. She was much nettled at the latter's abrupt departure.

"If you were my protégé," she went on, sourly, "I should not hand you over to your employer without admonishing you to be good and obedient and industrious."

"I shall be that without being admonished," said Camille, quietly.

"And therefore you stand there idling with your hands in your pockets. Am I to pay you a franc a day for doing nothing?"

"I wait for your orders, Madame," said Camille.

"Orders—orders—you have eyes in your head; can't you see that row of books all tumbled about?"

and she pointed to the stone ledge which adjoined the booth on the left.

Camille set about his task without a word. Tenderly, reverently he picked up the volumes one by one, and his heart danced inside him with delight. Oh, what treasures he was revelling in—Virgil, Molière, Lafontaine ! And that was for what he was paid—for being accorded his greatest desire. He was indeed a lucky fellow. He expressed his thought in a look at Madame, and Madame had an idea that he was making eyes at her.

"The fellow has good taste, and a great deal of impudence," she said to herself. "I say," she called out, "get me a *petit-pain* and a glass of negus from across the road, and take care you don't spill any of it ; I have an attack of faintness."

Camille executed the commission, and went back to his books ; but he found that in the course of the morning Madame had periodical fits of faintness. He also discovered that one *petit-pain* can go the length of four glasses of negus. But this did not prevent Madame from doing justice to a substantial lunch brought to her by arrangement from the neighbouring cookshop. Just then Camille came up to ask her the price of a book from which the label had been torn, and that reminded her that other people were also subject to human necessities.

"It is now one o'clock, and you have worked four hours out of your ten," she said, counting on her fingers. "Here are eight sous that you have earned ; go and get yourself something. Don't stay too long, and don't eat too much—that makes people lazy."

Camille did not stop to think of the irony which might underlie the advice, but dashed off to the

nearest cabaret and feasted on bread and cheese and vinegar. He was back in seven minutes, and was rewarded by an approving look from Madame.

"A likely lad," she told herself; "if he keeps as he is, he will be a godsend." And then her train of thoughts ran on: "Somehow the entrance to this booth gets narrower day by day, and if I squeeze myself through it in the morning, and out again at night, it is quite enough excitement for me. And now I can sit still and look on comfortably how he runs himself off his legs here and there and everywhere. Of course the customers don't smile as they did when I served them, but then not everybody has the power to make people smile as I have."

She pulled out a hand-glass and surveyed herself complacently. "True," she went on, "the complexion a little high and moustaches a little prominent, but everything else perfect—perfect."

She leaned back in her chair, crossed her arms over her extensive bosom, and made music as she slept.

Camille was in excellent spirits. At last he had made a start in life. Of course, it meant standing on his legs for ten hours at a stretch, and his hands and feet were rather numb; for the wind came biting cold from the river, although the winter had as yet only sent his vanguard and had not arrived in full force. But that was of no consequence. He was sure of two meals a day, he was sure of his night's lodging—at least for the present; he associated with the master-minds of the world—in second-hand condition, it is true. But surely all this meant getting on in life. He thought of what he was two days ago and of what he was now, and he felt a pitiful contempt for the beggar boy Camille, robbed, heavy-hearted, despairing.



How all that was changed. He was Camille the wage-earner, the factotum of Madame Fluquette, the useful, hopeful member of society, with one foot firmly planted on the ladder of fortune. After all, things might have been a good deal worse; he might not have met Krantz, and he might even now have been drifting about, a starving vagabond, or—. He shuddered; somehow the still, ghost-like, shrunken things behind the glass partition rose up before him.

Yes, all that was done with. He would work and he would live, and in time the glorious dreams would become realities. He would yet touch them and feel them, both with heart and hand, the blessings of affluence, ease, happiness, with which he painted the unstable flimsy canvas of the future, and which the magic of time would make enduring, ineffaceable. And then, what would he not do—what would he leave undone? He would give tribute to fortune in his benefactions to mankind; he would relieve misery, stamp out crime, which is the child of ignorance and want; he would help genius over the hurdles of penury that bar and mar its progress; he would . . . .

"I feel so faint, get me a glass of negus," droned on his ear.

Madame had woken up with a huge yawn that engulfed all Camille's daydreams, and buried in her capacious gullet the castles of air that were rising so promisingly with stately turrets and cupolas and embattlements. Sadly he took the beaker Madame held out to him, and went across to have it filled. It reminded him that he had been reading ahead a few chapters—he wondered how many—in the volume of his life. At present he was only the drudge of a capricious termagant, and from that to the kingly rôle

he had portioned out for himself was still a mighty stride.

And this consideration made him feel extremely humble and abject to Madame. A look from her was to him a command. When closing time came, he securely fastened down the wooden cases over the books to prevent the thieves getting at them; the Quartier Latin was very near, and, as Madame said, there was many a poor devil of a student on the prowl for a volume or treatise he could not afford to buy. And then Camille took up the daily papers which had not been disposed of, and patiently trudged on with Madame to her lodgings. It was weary work, for the parcel was heavy, and he had to keep step with Madame, who slid back two paces for each one she took forward. He was used to carrying loads, and his memory reverted to the time when he went to gather the fagots of pine in the great wood that ran by Lunette. But the bundles that might have made freight for a small waggon had been as featherweights to him, for the buoyant air carried half the burden, and he could step out surefooted and freely all the length that God had made his legs, and his voice had shrilled aloud among the solemn low-whispering giants for very joy in the strength of his sinews. But this miserable parcel of print seemed crushing him to the ground, and he felt as though the broken-winded flesh-mountain puffing along at his side had also saddled itself on his shoulders and clung there, the emblem of a hard fate and a heavy lot. Well, he would bear it as long as he needs must, and throw it off in its due hour.

Madame came to a standstill.

"We have arrived," she said, with a groan of satis-

faction ; " put the things in the concierge's lodge, and they will be fetched away in the morning. Here are your other twelve sous. Good evening, and don't be late to-morrow."

Camille departed with an obsequious salute, and left Madame to toil up the six flights of stairs to her attic. He found his way back to the hut without much difficulty. On the way he bought provisions and writing materials ; for, now that he earned his living, he had no cause to put off any longer what appeared to him a sacred duty.

Krantz stood at the door looking out for him.

" I thought Madame Fluquette had eaten you for supper," he said ; " you would just be enough for a mouthful or two."

" That would be an odd way of showing that she was satisfied with me," laughed Camille, making himself at home ; " but except her fat there is nothing terrible about her. She has, however, a strong antipathy to negus, and destroys it unmercifully. Have you had supper ? "

" I have no appetite," replied Krantz.

Camille fetched out his eatables and divided them into four parts. " Two for to-night, and two for breakfast to-morrow," he explained briefly.

Then having done his duty, he attacked the humble fare. It tasted very well, so well indeed that his hunger could not be entirely responsible for it. But it flashed across his mind that he was eating of the labour of his own hands—in the haste and hurry of the snack at the cabaret he had forgotten it. He straightway resolved to be mindful of it next time, and on all subsequent occasions : it was a capital sauce.

"I must write a letter to my father," he said, when he had finished.

"Then make haste," advised Krantz; "that tallow candle won't burn for more than three hours."

Camille set about his task without more to-do.

"My dear little Papa," he began, "I have had no opportunity of writing before this, and I hope you have not worried about me. You see, I have arrived in Paris; I was not kidnapped on the road, nor murdered, and I have still all my limbs. I like Paris very well—it is so large, and nobody knows you are only the schoolmaster's son. I have met some very nice people who look after me.

"Now I must tell you about the uncle. I went to look for him, and found him, and you will be surprised to hear that he is not my uncle at all. He is a Piedmontese, with a crooked nose and one eye, and he never had a brother, only eight sisters—two of them twins. So he can't be your brother. I shall not trouble to look for the real uncle, because I might make another mistake. However, if I come across him, I shall let you know all about it.

"This morning I started working for my living, which feels very nice. I am manager of a library—a sort of open-air library—and meddle with books all day long, yards and yards of them. I don't think the Pastor, the M<sup>aire</sup>, and the Police Commissioner all together have as many as I have.

"I can't start saving money yet to send you, because there are so many people in Paris that only a little goes to each one's share. By and by, when some of them die off, there will be more for me. They die very fast, because yesterday I saw quite five of them behind a glass case. If as many as that died in our

village in one day, you would soon have no one left to teach. And if the five brats of cobbler Bourdonnier made a start, it would be no loss to you either—eh, little papa?

“And now I am anxious to know how things stand with your health. I hope the M<sup>aire</sup> has had no fresh paint on his garden hedge lately—you know what I mean, daddy. I sometimes think of that stained handkerchief, and it makes me feel cold all over. Does Babette take care of you? Tell her if she does not air your sheets and give you a warm foot-bottle every night I shall come one day, when she is quite sober, and conjure her dead husband out of his grave—that always works with her. Of course, now that you have no idle parasite in your household, you can afford yourself a few luxuries; at any rate, you need not observe all the fasts in the calendar for the sake of economy. I want you to be strong and healthy by the time I make my fortune, so that you can start enjoying it right away.

“Give my best regards to my old friend, the chestnut-tree in the churchyard, and for yourself, take the love of your ever dutiful son, CAMILLE.”

He closed the envelope, and went out to post it, walking softly, not to wake Krantz, who had dozed off. He sauntered along leisurely, looking at the streets with the air of a proprietor. Why should he not? He had defrayed the day's expenses, and was still one sou to the good. He stopped underneath a street lamp, and looked at the coin. A feeling of awe came over him. This insignificant piece of bronze, half-defaced and down at heels, as it were, was a great curiosity. Might it not be the nucleus of vast riches, the embryo of numberless millions? He

looked up to the sky, and his lips half-voiced his prayer :

“Good God in heaven, I am only a poor boy, with a sick old father, and a wicked uncle who disowns me, and no other friend in the world save You and my patron saint. I don’t ask much—I only want to be rich ; and that is a little thing for You, who can put so much gold into the sunset and dawn, and so much silver into the stars. Grant my request, and give Your blessing to this little sou.”

He got no further. A squeaky voice sounded on his ear :

“Give me a little something, kind sir ; I have not eaten to-day, and I feel so hungry.”

Camille turned round, and saw the eyes of a decrepit old man glare famishingly into his.

“Great God, but for me this might be my father’s fate one day,” he thought, with a shudder.

Feverishly he thrust the coin into the wrinkled hand and hurried back.

## CHAPTER SIXTH

## *POTIPHAR'S WIDOW*

CAMILLE was at his post in good time next morning. If he was early, Madame was punctual. At two minutes to nine he saw her waddling towards the booth, where she arrived at stroke of the hour. Camille expeditiously opened the shutters, unlocked the cases and removed the covers so nimbly that Madame called herself names for having foolishly endangered her life for the last three years in performing these same tasks herself. True, the gendarme on the beat had helped her, if he happened to be passing at the time, but then he had never had the good sense nor the politeness to refuse the tip which she felt herself in duty bound to offer. Now she just stood watching with her arms akimbo, and a feeling of sovereignty in her heart. Of course she had had slaves before, but they had also, in their respective times, been her husbands; but to possess for her own peculiar chattel a stranger, was a different pair of sleeves altogether. It had been arranged that she was to preside over the daily papers, while Camille was to manage the book-stall; but he was to have the privilege of administrating both provinces, should Madame be tempted at any moment to seek remission from the burden of her responsi-

bilities in slumber, and as the negus was fairly soporific, this happened not infrequently.

Camille was quite satisfied with the arrangement, for while Madame snored he was at liberty, with occasional interruptions of trade, to rummage in the storehouse of wisdom of which he had been appointed janitor. Madame did not like it, because it put the books to unnecessary wear, which might impair their market value. Dog-ears were, in her estimation, a breach of morality. But a peculiar fatality seemed to pursue Camille. No sooner had he dipped into a volume, and had got to a proper pitch of interest, when a customer for it appeared. Do what he liked, there was no escaping. He had hidden the quaint old translation of Titius Livius, the Roman, under a pile of musty law-books, where no one would think of searching for anything worth having, and now comes this ferret-eyed collegian, and says: 'I remember seeing it here a few days ago, but I did not have the money.' And Madame swears it has not been sold, because it is not ticked off in her catalogue. And poor Camille has to tumble it out, and in the bargain gets a good scolding for not keeping things in their proper places. And as he watches the triumphant purchaser march off with it, he would have given half a day's wages to find out if old Manlius, the Consul, really had his son killed for fighting against orders. He could understand now what Fifine felt as she sold her flowers; and if it was stupid to bless the books that were sold, it could do no harm to curse the people who bought them.

He had not seen the young girl since their first meeting, nearly a week ago now. She occasionally came to the hut in the daytime when he was out, and



although Ricotte had invited him home several times, he had always felt too tired in the evening for anything but hugging his pallet. He usually met Krantz during the day, either at the cabaret or at the negus-shop, never in sight of Madame; not that Krantz was afraid of her, but he thought that his acquaintance with Camille would not redound to the credit of the latter in the eyes of his employer.

It was after lunch, and the aforesaid eyes were closed, and Camille was surreptitiously devouring a few pages of Couvier's History. His face glowed at the revelations of Nature's wonders, his breath went flying; he wanted to get to the end of the chapter before anything happened.

Suddenly he felt a sharp tug at his coat. He started up, and almost dropped the book. There was a tinkle of a laugh, and a silvery voice he remembered very well was saying :

"Why you seemed quite frightened, you great big booby of a boy, and that in open daylight; I thought you were going to scream."

"Ah, it's you, Fifine. I was thinking of you before."

"Thinking, thinking—what is the good of thinking?" she asked, scornfully. "I know what that means when I have to handle my flowers in the dark; I think of them hard, but they don't seem to be there. Well, since you haven't been to see me, I have come to you."

"That is very kind of you," replied Camille, feeling pleased and grateful, and casting an apprehensive look into the re-echoing booth; but no danger seemed threatening thence for the present.

"I like books," said Fifine, stepping up closer to

the shelves; "I should do nothing but read all day if I had time."

"I suppose you prefer books with pictures," suggested Camille.

"With pictures!" she echoed, with offended dignity. "Do you know, Monsieur, that I am fourteen? Look, I am nearly as tall as you." And she stretched herself to her uttermost length on tiptoe.

Camille looked down at her with a good-humoured smile.

"Then perhaps I am to call you Mademoiselle?"

"The idea! Only we can't be such good friends if you don't think I am grown up like yourself."

"I shall from now. Then, I suppose, you read grown-up books?"

"I don't know what I am to call them," she answered, with a perplexed air. "They are very funny; all of one kind too. Father brings them home, and sits poring over them for hours at a stretch. They are all about work and labour, and such things, and tell you what is going on in the world, and how it ought to go on differently than it does, and how the money isn't put to the right use, and how the working people are ill-treated—I can't remember all they say, and don't understand half. And then I ask father, and he explains. He is very clever at explaining. For instance——"

But whatever proof Fifine wanted to adduce in support of Ricotte's knowledge of economics remained a mystery for all ages. A snarl and a bellow came from the booth. Madame was up, and glared at them, red, rampant, ravening.

"Now, this is what I call faithful service," she screamed; "scarcely is one's head turned the other

way when you waste your time—my time—in chattering with sewer-scourings, with bold little street-hussies. This is what I get for taking you in charity, for feeding you to the very gorge—be off, you impudent, short-frocked baggage, or I shall make your cheeks tingle—be off, I tell you.”

Camille almost crouched down on all fours; Fifine looked at the shrill-voiced shrew without turning a hair.

“What does she say?” she asked Camille innocently.

“Go, dear little Fifine, go,” he whispered; “I shall tell you afterwards.”

“But I want to know now—what is she talking about?” asked Fifine very much louder.

Camille took his courage in both hands, and said to his fuming mistress:

“It is only Fifine, Madame, Monsieur Ricotte’s little daughter; she meant no harm, and I did not know . . . .”

He certainly did not know the effect his information would produce. Madame started back aghast, but recovered herself again immediately.

“Of all the blockheads in the world you are the worst,” she said vindictively to Camille; “to provoke me as you do is short of idiocy. Why did you not say so at once? Fifine, of course, that must be she”—her voice changed from vinegar to honey—“the very image of her father, the same gentle eyes, the same—what shall I say?—the same mouth; come here, let me kiss you, my sweet little pet.”

“I am not a bit like my father,” said Fifine, as little impressed by her fulsomeness as by her fulminations; “else, I am sure, the tears would not come in his eyes when he sometimes looks at me and says, ‘Ninette, Ninette,’—ah, so sadly.”

"Quite true, it is your mother that you resemble, now that I come to think of it," went on Madame undaunted; "I knew there was something about your face that made me love you as soon as I set eyes on it; only Camille here is such a stupid, and always makes everything go wrong—does he not, my angel?"

"No, he does not," snapped Fifine.

"Of course he does not," agreed Madame with bare-faced inconsistency. "But when one starts up after a five minutes' nap, which one expected would last ten, one is—never mind, come here, little darling, and take these two sous to buy yourself some peppermints."

"Keep your two sous, and here are two more to buy yourself a good strong muzzle to keep you from biting people when you talk to them."

Madame winced; she must try to conciliate the little fury, because if these things came to Ricotte's ears, he would not approve. And she wished to stand well with Ricotte—for various reasons.

"Ha, ha," she guffawed, at the risk of apoplexy, "what a clever thing of you to say! Nine out of ten children your age would not have thought of it; you are a little naughty, Fifine, but so charmingly, so angelically naughty—one forgives you everything."

Fifine almost stamped her foot with vexation. She wanted to be rude to the red fat woman, undeniably rude; but it all rolled off her like water from a duck's back.

"How nicely you talk all at once," she said quizzingly, "just the way one would talk to a street hussy—whatever you may mean by that. But, you know, I like you ever so much better when you scream and squeak, and get red up to your ears like a turkey. Do it again, please, will you? It's as good as a circus."

"Ah," said Madame, shaking her head sorrowfully, "that shows how ill you understand me. If you knew how it pains me to be angry with anyone—I cry for hours afterwards. Believe me, I am good as the day is long; my heart is soft as putty. Now, just to take an instance. I am a woman who can afford to live on her income—your father knows that, but you can remind him of it again—and yet, why do I keep up this concern? Why do I get up at seven these frosty mornings and sit here shivering all day? Only because I know that if I were to shut it up, it would throw this poor youth"—she pointed accusingly at Camille—"out of employment. But I keep him to oblige your father; I would do a great many things to please your father—you may mention that to him."

She paused, breathless with the rush of her words.

"Again," she resumed after a moment, "I am very charitable. Just over the road there is a drink-shop, and the man sells the vilest negus in the world, and never gives full measure; and yet I patronise him, even at the cost of afflicting myself. And why? Because he is poor and depends greatly on my support for his living. I could tell you of other things, but then I am not the one to sound everything on the big bell. If you would only come to see me sometimes—oh, the spice cakes I bake! You could eat all you wanted, and take the rest home to your father."

"Do you bake them yourself?" asked Fifine.

"Yes, my angel," was the unwary reply.

"What, with those big red hands?" and Fifine pursed her lips in disgust. She hated big red hands, for she had a dim recollection of long white fingers, which, years and years ago, used to pass over her forehead so soothingly.

Madame gave up the struggle.

"One can see you have no mother," she said brutally, settling back in her seat with an air of injured majesty.

Fifine had also had enough of her. She turned to Camille, who had been standing all through in painful confusion; he would be held responsible for Fifine's back-handed pleasantries, and no doubt there would be consequences.

"And you must be near her all day?" whispered Fifine pityingly.

Camille nodded assent. Somehow the simple question brought out all the hatefulness of the necessity; but that was because Madame had never before revealed herself so patently a vixen, liar, and hypocrite—the things he most abhorred.

"Don't stop now, Fifine; I shall come to you to-night, and then we can have a good long talk," and his eyes looked into hers beseechingly. If the thunderstorm had to come, let it come quickly and clear the air.

"Very well," said Fifine; "here—write your promise on my mouth," and she held up her lips.

Camille kissed her hurriedly, blushing all over his face, and with an inward tremor. This would fill to the brim the measure of his iniquities.

However, Fifine had gone one minute, two, five minutes, and still there was no outbreak. Furtively Camille glanced into the booth, but Madame sat there in a calm and placid reverie, and as her eye caught his, it actually blinked approvingly. For Camille this had a new terror; it was unnatural, it ran counter to all accepted phenomena.

Still, there were no further developments; the in-

cident passed over in the progress of time, and day succeeded day in monotonous routine. Madame kept no holidays; a week was made seven days, and she saw no reason why one should be treated with more ceremony than another. That might do for sentimental people, but Madame was much too solid in her constitution to possess pores of conscience. She had tried observing Sundays; but she found they were merely disagreeable landmarks in the march of life. They showed so emphatically that a week had passed, a whole week, then another, and then a whole month, and she realised with a shudder that she was one-twelfth of a year older. To feel so keenly that your life is passing away from you is a perpetual suicide. And therefore she had given up counting time, and dragged on an existence dull and uniform, looking neither behind nor ahead.

If Camille had different views, it was only natural that he should subordinate them to hers. And so she kept his nose to the grindstone, week in, week out, while the ice floes drifted down the river in shoals, and the sky was cracking with cold, and one expected the angels to come tumbling out through the opening any minute of the day. One morning she brought him an old overcoat, and surveyed its fit critically.

"A little loose, perhaps," she thought to herself; "but then he need not study the fashions."

Camille took no joy in Madame's present; he believed in the old adage: "Fear the foe, even when he brings you gifts." And though Madame did not show herself hostile, he could not call her a friend; she worked him too hard, she paid him too little, she tyrannised him too much. And moreover, since that interview with Fifine, she did not sleep half as much

as she used to; more and more frequently she fixed on him the untranslatable look he had first noted after the interview in question—a good-natured Cerberus-like expression that more than anything else seemed to say: “Go on enjoying yourself, my boy; I won’t eat you just yet.” It would have disconcerted an Egyptian mummy.

But Madame did not believe in showing her hand too soon.

“Let him suffer a little; it will make him more tractable later on,” she kept thinking.

Whatever the ‘later on’ might mean, the winter had passed, the swallows came back—they had met the ice-floes hurrying down to the sea for all they were worth—and the spring bounded into the land, smiling, blossoming, twittering, before Madame decided on any definite action.

“A bird in the hand, worth two in the bush,” she reflected; “Ricotte is all very well, if I could get him. But in the meantime this fellow might slip through my fingers. He costs me seven francs a week as a servant; he would cost me six as a husband. Eight sous a day for food, and no expense in clothes. Gustave wore Gringoire’s without a murmur; what a pity they had to bury him in that beautiful broadcloth coat and vest—cost twenty francs. Well, it was the only occasion on which he was extravagant. Let us see what we can do with this young man.”

Mercifully for Camille, all unconscious of the ponderous ambush in preparation against him, she did not think fit to start operations for another week or two; but one day he was surprised at Madame’s abstinence. One negus time after another came and went, and still she gave no orders.



"She must be ill," he thought.

Just then the signal came; but, wonder of wonders! she asked for two glasses at once.

"I suppose she is going to make up for it with a rush," conjectured Camille.

But when he set them down on the counter before her, she retained his arm, and held up a glass for him to take.

"She has gone crazy," thought Camille, ungratefully.

"Drink it, my dear," she cooed; "no fuss—it will do you good. Ah, one can see you are not used to luxuries; you should not gulp it off like that; you must sip feelingly—like this, see?"

There was certainly more elegance in her way of drinking.

"It's very nice," she continued; "how would you like to drink such stuff every day, as much as you wanted?"

What she thought was: "Water for the beast when . . ."

"I think I should soon get tired of it," answered Camille, more and more nonplussed.

"Because your education has been neglected; you are young, shamefully young; you have many things to learn, and unless somebody takes you in hand you won't get on."

"No," said Camille.

"And that somebody should be a woman."

"Yes," was the mechanical answer.

"And it must not be a very young woman," and Madame grew warm with her subject. "They are too frivolous; it must be a woman of mature sense, of sober judgment, of chastened affections, whose only

thought would be your welfare, who knows the world and its pitfalls, and with whose guidance you will avoid breaking your neck and legs."

"Yes," said Camille, vacantly. What was the meaning of all this drivel?

"Now, there is one such woman in the world," continued Madame, insinuatingly; "I know her, and you know her, and perhaps she will not mind sacrificing herself for the good of a fellow-being; can't you think of her, dear Camille?"

The lad started back, and looked terror-stricken at the mincing monster before him; it was as though the cold clammy tentacles of an octopus were twining round his body.

Madame took his consternation for a compliment. Poor boy, surely his good fortune was enough to disconcert him.

"What do you mean?" he stammered.

"Do you think I am joking?" she said re-assuringly. "I mean that if I were to marry you, you would come into possession of an independent income, a nice little sum to start life with, a good, sensible wife, not ill-looking either, and——"

"But I don't want to marry," protested Camille.

"Don't have any scruples," said Madame. "I know I am much above you in station, but in a year or two I trust to elevate you sufficiently——"

"I don't want to be elevated," said Camille firmly; "and I don't want to marry you, once for all."

Madame became white—in her case a light shade of pink.

"Why not?" she rasped.

Camille looked round for a loophole; if he told her the truth she might kill him.

"I promised my father, before I left home, not to marry for ten years," he said at last, lamely.

"And there is no chance that you will," said Madame viciously, "unless your wife wants to eat dirt and sleep in the gutter. There, get back to your work, you graceless vagabond, and never speak to me on the subject again."

The day passed drearily. Not a word, not a look did Madame vouchsafe to him, but her fingers moved restlessly; Camille thought they were itching to clasp him by the throat.

At last it got to closing time.

"Take this packet," said Madame, as though nothing had happened.

They walked on towards Madame's lodgings, and Camille marvelled at her pace—it was quick and springy; but then, of course, she wanted to get rid of him as quickly as possible.

"You must take it upstairs," she said, when they had arrived.

That was nothing new; he had been to her room frequently. There was always something to sort, and to be taken backwards and forwards. Madame followed him up without another word. Contrary to custom she did not stop to visit the people on each floor, but came right up. That, too, was natural. After what had occurred, thought Camille, she would not trust him alone among her belongings; for there seemed to be a tacit understanding that henceforth the booth and the bookstall, the negus-shop and the cabaret across the road would know him no more. He must go afield, where the arm of fifteen-stone widows, who desired him in matrimony, would not reach him—and the thought was not unpleasant. At

last he would be rubbing shoulders with the world. So far he had not touched it; he had caught a glimpse of it by peering round the curves of this multitudinous carcase that bunged up his perspective. But now he was done with her, and life seemed larger and loftier. Was it the ascent of the interminable staircase that suggested the idea? And then again his thoughts veered round to a sombre mood. As he reached the top and came to a standstill, it seemed to remind him that even the most cloud-scaling aspiration must pause somewhere, and a relentless destiny would say: "Here is your goal. Enter! Lay down your load, for your service, which availed you so little, is done."

It was not in these words that Madame's bidding came to Camille, but nevertheless he obeyed it very promptly; and while he was placing the packet on the rickety kitchen chair by the hearth, Madame had, with unerring hand, trimmed and lighted up the small paraffin-lamp which self-denyingly wafted its reeky fragrance into every wall crevice. Its light cast a lurid glow over Madame's features, and did not accentuate them to their advantage.

So Camille thought as he stood there waiting to receive her final injunctions. But Madame was in no hurry; in fact, there seemed something purposeful in this aimless pause. At last she thought it had endured long enough. Deliberately she stretched out her hand for the very cheap flower-vase that had always made the mantel-shelf, on which it stood, give itself airs over the dresser, and dashed the ornament to the floor. After that she, of malice prepense, upset the coalscuttle, so that the contents distributed themselves all over the room with much precipitance

and clatter. Then, as though all this did not already form sufficient cause for enquiry, she projected herself out of the door, slammed it violently, and holding on to the handle as though for dear life, commenced to articulate at the top of her voice.

The commotion served its object. In a moment many feet came hurrying up the stairs, a frightened buzz and hum went through the house, and people looked at one another with scared faces.

"Something is wrong with Madame ; let us go and see," they said.

And so they came up, men and women, the tinker from the fifth story, the rag and bone merchant from the fourth, the washerwoman from the third—all except the little chorus-girl on the left hand of the second, who rushed out into the street, carrying her paralytic mother in case of fire, a thing she did on the smallest provocation.

In the meantime Madame was shouting at bursting pitch.

"What have you in there?" asked the tinker, who was a practical man, as befitted his calling.

"A wild beast, a monster, an assassin," screamed Madame, excelling all previous efforts. "Look at him yourselves,"—she flung the door open melodramatically—"look at him, and see if the gallows are not written on his face."

But Madame's keenness of sight was not shared by the other beholders. All they saw before them was a pale, trembling lad, evidently very much frightened.

"And do you know what he did?" continued Madame crescendo ; "he clutched hold of me, here, by the arm, and wanted me to swear on the cross that I would marry him to-morrow,—if not he would

strangle me and kill himself afterwards. Marry me! the outrageous, impudent, drivel-mouthed scamp wanted to marry me—do you hear that? Oh, what shall I do—I am disgraced for life, I, a respectable widow of two citizens, with an independent income of my own! But you shall rue it, you sacrilegious, horrible, baboon-faced——”

She did not wait to hear herself out, but hurled herself, full bulk and weight, on Camille, raining blow on blow with short little yelps, till the washerwoman, who in her leisure time read Dante, crossed herself; it was like a scene from *Inferno*.

Camille could do nothing. Luckily Madame's chastisement was not painful; her fists seemed made of india-rubber, so it only felt like being pummelled with a bolster. But all the same, it was humiliating to be cuffed like a schoolboy in front of all these people; so he edged closer and closer to the door, and while Madame threw her arm back for a huger sweep, he ducked under, took a flying leap that scattered the retinue outside, and was midway to the bottom before anyone thought of picking Madame out of the clothes-basket where she was sticking head first. But in spite of her frantic adjurations, no one made a move to pursue the cut-throat runaway.

Five minutes afterwards, Camille was narrating his adventure to Ricotte and Krantz, who would have laughed if they had not thought it would be out of keeping with Camille's look of chagrin. So instead they punctuated his story with vigorous, if uncomplimentary, comments on Madame. Fifine listened attentively and said nothing. But next day, and for a week following, Madame wondered at the sudden increase of ragamuffins parading the streets in the

neighbourhood of her booth with discordant yells. She also wondered whether there was any connection between them and the periodic stinging pains she felt on her face, and what meant the peas and paper pellets that came hailing broadcast over her counter. Fifine could have told her.

## CHAPTER SEVENTH

## *CAMILLE IS TRIED AND FOUND WANTING*

CAMILLE woke at his usual hour next morning. He made a mechanical dash for his boots, then suddenly recollected himself, and lay back again ; he had plenty of time before him. By the opposite wall slept Krantz, snoring in three different keys at once—perhaps because the straw had slipped away from under his head so that it was left hanging nearly level with the ground. For the first time, because he had more leisure for observation, Camille noticed how full-fed and prosperous his own mattress looked by the side of his chamber-fellow's ; and he knew better than to ascribe this fact to accident, or to a lacking sense of proportion in Krantz. It was the latter who made the beds at night, and—well, he could make them as he liked. Ricotte had insisted on Camille taking up his abode at the hut permanently, and Camille had insisted on repaying his kindness at the rate of one franc per week and an unspecified amount of gratitude.

He had taken the two men to his heart, till he sometimes felt afraid of the affection he bore them. Were they not usurpers in the domain of his feelings where his father had so far held full and undivided sway ? And then, again, he felt ashamed of this fear, for it implied a momentary disloyalty to the old man in the



Normandy village, whom he had enthroned in his heart, deep in his most vital core, whence no one could oust him unless they ousted life itself. He had written him all about these two men, and about the young girl who was given liberty to trample where others were not allowed to walk on tiptoe; and the answer had come in fervent utterance of blessings on these good people who dispensed their goodness for goodness' sake.

Ricottè had laughed boisterously.

"You have been telling the old man stories," he said, after hearing the letter; "put his blessings back in the envelope, and tell them they have come to the wrong address."

Krantz looked very serious, and said: "This is most awkward; I never had a blessing in my life. Now I suppose I shall have to live up to it—and I am hanged if I know how to."

But it was Fifine who struck the right note.

"Why does your father make all this fuss over us? Don't people ever say or do kind things to him?"

Camille looked at her through the tears in his eyes, and patted her head silently; but the gesture was an unuttered oath that, as far and as soon as it lay in his hands, his father should have amends for the cuts and thrusts which the world had dealt him, and that the sunset of his life should not be tinged with the approaching shadows of night, but with the long concentrated reflections of the golden daylight.

Yes, he would fulfil his promise. God knew how carefully he had remembered it; how gladly he had frozen, how cheerfully he had hungered, all because each shiver of cold, each pang of hunger had been test and token that his vow was no idle form to him.

So far his martyrdom had availed him nothing—nay, it had to begin again from the start. Well, let it take whatever form it would, he was not going to shrink from it. For a moment it flashed across his mind if after all he had been right in rejecting Madame's proposal, preposterous as it was; but no, his father would never demand such a sacrifice from him, and would not have thanked him for making it.

But he wished that things had run on without a break. He had his liberty, and did not know what to do with it. He looked at his hands and feet; they were firm and strong, and cried to him: "Give us work—it is torture to be idle."

They would have their wish; did not his heart echo it to its loudest? But how soon? And in the meantime?

Carefully he took from his pocket a piece of knotted linen and untied it: there they lay, the twenty-five francs which he had accumulated sou by sou, and which were to have been his first gift to his father. He had intended sending it the morning before—the last in his service under Madame—together with a letter full of hope and comfort; but he had met Fifine and had dallied talking to her, till he had no time left for the post office, and had to make all haste in order to be in time at the booth. He gnashed his teeth with vexation: if he had only sent it, if it had once been out of his hands. He would have to let the future shift for itself. But now it would be criminal of him to deprive himself of his little provident fund; how long might it be till he was earning money again? He had already learnt that in the spoons of strangers, however readily offered, there is always a taste of wormwood which does not add flavour to the meal.

And indeed it was not till his stock was almost

exhausted that an opportunity presented itself. One day Krantz came home with the news. The butcher in Rue Tibourg had told him that his wife had run off with his assistant that morning. He did not so much mind his wife, but he missed the assistant; and though the time, which he had spent in trying to manage his helpmeet, he could now bestow on managing his business, he still could not carry on the concern quite alone; and butcher boys were scarce at that time of the year.

Camille needed no further bidding. It might be a fool's errand as so many other attempts of his had been, but then he must do his duty. In three strides—more or less—he was in Rue Tibourg, and had soon discovered the shop in question, because it was a small street and contained only one butcher's shop. Moreover, he knew he was right as soon as he stepped in, because the place looked exactly as if any wife and any assistant would run away from it, together or singly. There were chop blocks, cobwebbed and dingy, rusty meat hooks, unwashed and unkempt table-ledges, spotted and worm-eaten, and over all there floated, in place of atmosphere, a noisome, unhallowed vapour teeming with flies and alive with the scent of raw meat and stale blood. The blue-aproned figure of Monsieur Touchepas, the proprietor, with his stupendous prominence of paunch, the tumour on his temple, and the horn-like excrescence on his nose, gave a harmonious finish to the impressiveness of the scene.

Camille felt very much like beating a retreat; every breath he drew seemed laden with poison.

Touchepas just came out of the little parlour behind the shop, which in view of the multifarious purposes to which it was put, never quite learnt its identity and true character.

"Who are you—what do you want?" he asked; his voice came immediately from his stomach, for he had no neck to speak of or through.

"I am the person Monsieur Krantz mentioned to you for assistant." Camille shut his eyes as he spoke to keep up his resolution; he knew he was burning his ships behind him.

"You don't know the trade, Krantz told me," said the stomach-voice; "are you prepared to pay me a premium for teaching you it?"

"Goodness," thought Camille, "to be systematically choked, poisoned, slave-driven, and to pay for the privilege?—In that case I won't suit you," he said aloud with a breath of relief. "I have no money, and it is not a profession I should take up by preference."

"There, like all these young cubs, selfish and impudent," growled Touchepas. "I shall give you a franc a day; take off your coat and scrub the floor, and then scour the choppers."

"He does not ask me if I am satisfied," thought Camille, rolling up his shirt sleeves; "the same old 'franc a day.' Heigh ho, my market value has not yet risen; what a cheap article I am, to be sure. As to scrubbing the floor, it is a good suggestion; it looks as if a herd of kine had been stabled here for a week."

Touchepas had certainly no fault to find with his new man; he admitted Camille was a distinct improvement on his predecessor, whose only meritorious action had been to relieve him of an awkward domestic encumbrance; and Camille worked hard to keep the place tidy, as much from a sense of self-preservation as of duty.

The hours of labour were long. He had to be at

his post late at night, because the housewives bought their rations on the way home from their evening ramble; and early in the morning, because then came the housewives who had not rambled the evening before, and who thought it wise to do their shopping while the little ones were still in bed and out of mischief. The time between the extremes of the day Camille spent in house-to-house hawking. The meat-trough on his shoulder, he staggered along, faint and dizzy with occasional wafts from the receptacle of his wares, and followed by the execrations of passers-by who happened to be taking breath as he came alongside. Another man would have laughed, but to him the averted heads were typical of the disdain and disgust wherewith one skirt-gathers his way past a leper. It signified to him how little there was desirable in him, how valueless he was in the eyes of the world, even in the pursuit of an honest calling. Ah, it was wretched to be poor—a menial, a serf. One became almost convinced that such a one does not possess the same divinity, nay, not even the same humanity, which animates the more prosperous. And with that conviction, how can a man hold his head high—high enough to fix his eyes on the heavens that spread impartially over all, the same smiling serenity for prince and pauper, the same cloud-threatening immensity, according to its mood and humour—and take comfort from the sight? And so one gives up the struggle, the struggle for self-respect, and the soul becomes weak and worn and weary, for the fibres that braced it up, the hope and belief in self, are unstrung and withered, and one drifts along like a skiff without a rudder, happy to have cast overboard the God-given cargo, to be rid of it, to be irresponsible

and futile—a mere mechanism. Is it not better to dash your meat-trough into the gutter and your head against the curbstone, and have done with it there and then? Only there comes a voice all the way from a little Normandy village, a trembling, plaintive voice, which says: “Carry the load for my sake, I have carried so many loads in my time; remember by so doing you will in the end lighten mine.”

And then Camille went back to the fusty butcher-shop, to the blue-aproned proprietor with the excrescence on his nose, scoured the brass and steel hooks, haggled with the housewives, and slept in the cellar on the damp-gnawed, mange-eaten sheepskin which his master had assigned to him for a couch. And there he lay, and wondered and wondered if the stars were still shining as he had seen them shine through the crevices of his attic in the old-world Normandy village.

Camille saw very little of his friends; now and then he paid them a flying call; occasionally Krantz dropped in for a few minutes' chat at the shop. But when he found that Touchepas thought the visits were meant for him he discontinued them. In the beginning, too, Fifine had sometimes passed that way, and had never failed to give Camille toll in the shape of a bunch of flowers. Once she asked him what he did with them, and Camille stammered and blushed, and at last blurted out that Touchepas appropriated them to decorate the pig's head in the window. Fifine nearly cried at the desecration, and thenceforth the pig's head in the window had to gape out in beauty unadorned.

Yet this rarity of intercourse only welded the links of their friendship more closely. It compensated him for a week's toil and lovelessness when he saw the smile of welcome flit across Fifine's face, when he

grasped Ricotte's broad, hairy hand, and heard him say cheerily :

"How goes it? Haven't they chopped you up for sausage-stuffing yet?"

Krantz looked him up and down admiringly.

"What shoulders we are getting!—what muscles! I wager you could strangle a bull, and eat him from horn to tail-tip afterwards. What a blessing work is!" And the lazy do-nothing glanced at his own rounded shoulders, felt his attenuated biceps, and looked very virtuous.

But Camille knew better than to take his sentiment as entirely hypocritical. Some time ago he had learnt the sequel to Krantz's story of self-sacrifice. Liberated convicts are not, as a rule, in great demand among employers of labour, and a man handicapped by a prison record might well knock at many doors, and always receive the same shoulder-shrug for answer. And that may go on so long till his spirit is broken and his backbone has become collapsable. And then the will for work grows effete with its many abortive attempts, and one is in a fair way to perdition, unless one meets with a friend on whom one has a strong claim, which is gladly acknowledged and repaid.

Such was Krantz's story, and Camille thought of it with a great fear. It seemed so possible, so within one's reach and destiny, to strive, to fail, to give up. This was another solution to the meat-trough and curbstone question, and by far the less satisfactory. And this time Camille went home, his fingers itching to be at their task, and feeling as though the polishing of steel hooks were his only chance of salvation in this world and the next.

From then he took more cheerfully to his work ; he swallowed his squeamishness, he no longer shut his eyes and ears to what he saw and heard in the abattoir.

"Very well," he said, "if Providence intended to make of me nothing but a butcher, a butcher I shall be."

But Providence had expressed no opinion at all on the matter.

One day Touchepas appeared in the dazzling glory of a clean shirt-front.

"I am going to a christening," he informed Camille, "and you will have to keep a sharp eye on things. In particular, the cattleman will bring a calf at twelve o'clock, and you must make veal of it by one. It will give you practice. Take the spike-mallet and strike behind the ear, just as you have seen me do. Don't fail ; there are several orders."

Then he went and left Camille to the contemplation of the task before him.

He had so far never attempted killing ; Touchepas was far too fond of it to leave it in other hands. And thus it had become an eventuality which he had not anticipated, at least for the present.

But, sure enough, at twelve, the calf came, and Camille led it round to the shambles. He tied it to the wall-ring, and sat looking at it.

"There is plenty of time, till one," he said to himself. So he went back to the shop, and the solitary customer who came in remarked how pale he looked, and how his hands trembled as he weighed out the purchase.

It struck one, and Camille returned to the stable. The animal, which had fallen on its haunches, stumbled



to its feet as he came in, and looked at him wistfully. It plainly asked · "Where is my mother?"

He took the ropes, pinioned it fore and hind, and put its head into the wooden yoke; but, search as he would, he could not find the leather face-mask to put over its vision. And so the thing kept staring at him in fear and wonder. And as it saw him lift the mallet, a terrible look of almost human apprehension came into its eyes; the long-gathered tears ran over, and a low, agony-drawn bellow came forth like a cry for mercy.

Camille stood as though petrified, the murderous implement high in the air; his heart thumped with loud thick thuds, as though each were going to be its last. Then suddenly his arms came down just as if the sinews had snapped, the mallet clattered heavily to the floor, and Camille fled with a choking cry: "God, I cannot kill your creatures."

No, he was not meant for a butcher.

He did not know how long he sat on the step-ladder in the corner, dazed and bewildered. As though to throw light on the situation, he remembered an incident in his boyhood, consisting of a cat that had eaten his canary, a brick that got attached to the cat's neck, and a pond with which brick and cat were to make intimate acquaintance; everything was ready, and yet the cat lived to tell her progeny to the fifth generation how the brick alone got drowned, and the boy thought better than to kill a respectable matron cat just for eating a bunch of yellow feathers. The only thing she could not explain was why, after plunging in and saving her, he should have thrown himself sobbing on the sward. Surely his action was a cause for sincere self-congratulation and not for sorrow.

Camille thought of that and many other things. But through his meditations there came to him faint impressions that customers entered the shop and talked to him. For one, there came the sour-faced lady who kept the cookshop further up, and her conversation was about a mad Italian who boarded with her, and who had sworn that he would stiletto everyone, from the hostess to the kitchen poker, unless he had veal cutlets for supper. And then there was a man, hollow-cheeked and lean-eyed, who said that after eight weeks the doctor had at last allowed his wife to take solid food—a little veal, boiled to fibres in the soup—and now he had come to get it, because the shop was nearest, and he could not stay away long. Veal, veal, the whole world wanted veal—and in the meantime the calf lay pinioned in the shambles, chafing its head off in trying to extricate it from the slaughter stocks. Camille thought of it, but not for worlds would he have gone to look at the thing again.

About four Touchepas came back, a little exhilarated, but otherwise practical and business like.

"You should have brought the carcase into the shop, and hung it up," were his first words on entering; "it gets stale if left too long in the stable damp."

It is quite fresh yet," said Camille unconcernedly. He knew there would be consequences of some sort; but he did not mind what they were.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Touchepas after he had gone to look. The great anger-vein of his forehead stood out puffed and purple.

"I could not do it—that is all," explained Camille.

"Then you will go to the devil—that is all," roared Touchepas.

Camille took off his apron, put on his cap, and

walked out. For the first time since many weeks the world was again assuming its normal proportions of length and breadth. He had almost forgotten that it was infinite, and had room for other things besides shambles and calf-killing.

## CHAPTER EIGHTH

## *A SERMON IN STONES*

**S**WIFTLY he walked down the side turning into the great traffic artery to which it gave entrance. That, too, looked deserted. The July sun seemed to have made a clear sweep of everything it could lay hold of. Only here and there he met a sweltering errand boy, or an obdurate street-hawker creeping tardily to shelter. The wheels of the omnibuses and other conveyances had a muffled sound, as though the heat-haze had thickened into padding around them. The houses looked dazed and uneasy, with a whitish mist of gold upon them that might be fashioned of a million heat-devils dancing over them, up and down, in derision; and from roof to basement one thought seemed throbbing through them: "How lucky to be born a cellar."

But the pavement was in a worse plight. There it lay, without a particle of dust for a screen, one side shrivelled up by the merciless sky-furnace overhead, the other hugging the moist damp soil to which it was plastered; a most dangerous attitude, and one which, on account of the extremes of temperature, might result in ague-fever at any moment. Lamp-posts, barbers' poles, and all other appliances which followed an open-air occupation made desperate attempts to divest themselves of their coats of paint,

and the poor, tight-strung telegraph wires felt as though fiery tongues were licking them out of shape and existence. Everything was passing through a struggle for survival against a devouring elemental enemy; everybody felt his touch on throat and chest, and made shift of life by a suspended animation. The atmosphere hung dead; if there was a little stir, it was more like the momentary quiver of a thing in death-throes. Men, beasts, and things were resting—not a healthy invigorating rest, but a fretful fever, a narcotic torpor, that lay on them heavy as a nightmare, like a sleep that was all awakening and no slumber. The city lay prostrate; it lay as though an iron heel were pressing on its neck, writhing impotently, with short heaving gasps of suffocation, and wondering how much longer the fire-tipped fingers would come, stinging it till it fainted with its piteous helplessness. And in the meantime the blood-red orb on high blazed and spouted as if it were but the round mouth of a funnel reaching away into far and infinite reservoirs of flame—scorching, desolating, the emblem of the eternal feud that reigns between the elements and incarnate life.

Camille passed on unconcernedly. Let the city sleep, let it wake—what mattered it to him? It sufficed him that he felt his arm strong enough to shake it till it awoke, did he desire it. A sense of dominion came over him as he strode on, like that of one who rules a kingdom, though it be but a kingdom of the dead. His life was tingling through him from head to foot, his strength was straining in his sinews with galvanic palpitations, with leaps and jerks, and seemed running to waste amid this lethargy and desolation. He wanted to feel it, to test it; he

stopped before one of the elms that lined the street's edges and thought it would be child's play for him to root it up, trunk and branch. Or again he looked at the lumbering quadrupeds that crept past him, with an urgent desire to load them on their vehicles and harness himself in their traces. Anything—only to feel that he was alive, and that strength was life.

He walked on, and mechanically his steps bent towards the river. The quays were empty. In the distance he could see Madame Fluquette's booth, and wondered if she was dreaming that the devil had come to roast her in a cauldron of live coals. The river drifted sleepily, monotonously, without an eddy or crinkle to mar its smooth equanimity; the swift flash which here and there broke across its expanse was only a venturesome wavelet that had come to the surface to blink its eyes against the sun, and then flitted back from the blinding glare into the cool recesses beneath. Camille stopped for a moment and nodded to the stream as to an old friend. He had become well acquainted with it in the days of his servitude under Madame. He had watched it in all its moods, till it possessed no mysteries for him; and he loved it, angry or serene. Had he not more than once drawn comfort from its myriad aspects that resembled the ever-varying phases and manifestations of life? Had he not entrusted to its keeping many an hour of anguish, despair, resignation—and what can one hold dearer than the men or things that are the receptacles of one's aches and sorrows? During the time he had been at Touchepas' shop, he had seen little of it or nothing, and now he was forging anew the chains of association, although the old links showed no rift or fissure. Yes, thus it would ever be

with him—firm and faithful to his friends, riveted to them despite the clefts and wedges of his fortunes, carrying the images of those he loved in his heart as those of his household gods. Now he knew why the river always reminded him of his father.

He had gone on a few yards, when a low clicking came on his ears. It seemed far away, but gradually it assumed the resonance of steel striking against stone. He was curious to know what it meant. People were about and astir; it was the first sign of activity he had encountered on his walk. The sight of it would do him good, and therefore he quickened his step in the direction of the sound. Soon he could locate it more definitely. It rose from a depth, apparently from a wharf on the river-side, for the short, metallic reports seemed to be scaling the walls of the embankment before they rang out aloft. In another minute or two he had come to a bridge, whereon he stepped in order to get a better view ahead, for the clear sonorousness of the sounds told him he must be near their source. And what he saw was this.

Skirting the river ran a long mound of flint and granite, massed in unwieldy blocks, interspersed with little mountains of earth that made the place look like a quarry. The glittering sunshine flashed against it with hard and stubborn impact that scattered its radiance back in a million atoms of shivered light, and the dreary mass lay there, stern and desolate, sundered, as it were, from all the world by a destiny of its own. In the midst of it a number of men were moving, splintering it with pickaxes and mattocks, and to see them working away there made one think of demons who were ripping the rocks into pieces to make with them an insurmountable barrier that was

to fence in their purgatory. They were all powerful, strong-limbed fellows; their skin, that showed bare to the waist, was tanned and wizened by the heat, and Camille fancied, as he saw them shovelling the great fragments of stone, that he could hear the cracking of vertebrae, as though all the marrow had been burned dry within.

Close to the bank lay a huge black tug like a coffin without a lid, and leading to it by a gradual incline were laid, at intervals and parallel, planks two feet in breadth, along which the men carted their wheelbarrows, when full, and discharged them into the yawning hull.

Camille watched them fascinated, watched them coming and going monotonously, without a break, moving by the mere force of their own impetus, like pendula. The sturdy planks trembled and creaked beneath the weight; one false move to the right or left would dash the carrier fifteen feet to the bottom. And if his head was not battered in by the fall, there were at least six boulders in his load that would do him the service. Once or twice Camille felt his heart stop; now—nearly—something must happen this time, but the man recovered from the lurch and pushed on hardily, as though he had not the moment before been grazing the very elbow of death. Over all there lay a reckless, defiant strength, oblivious of itself and all else, dreading nothing because it felt nothing, and the faces of the men were set in stony callousness, the impress of which they seemed to have caught from the granite masses around.

A sudden idea struck Camille, and without pausing to consider it, he walked towards the break in the parapet where a staircase of rough-hewn stone with



iron balustrade led down to the river side. A few yards further he came upon the first group of men. He halted irresolutely, waiting to be taken notice of. But none of them looked round at his approach.

Camille became disconcerted. Just then one of the gang passed close to him with his empty barrow.

"Could I get a job here?" asked Camille, stepping up.

The man looked him up and down without changing his mien, and passed on.

Camille felt angry; this was treating him with contempt. He followed his man and repeated the question.

"What have you done with your feeding bottle?" was the gruff answer.

Camille stared at him. "I don't know what you mean," he stammered.

"You have run away from your nurse, you bad boy, and now you have got a touch of the sun," continued the man.

Camille understood at last.

"You mean I am too young?" he said. "Look here." He stooped and gripped the largest block he could lay hands on, and lifting it high above his head dashed it down again.

The man and his fellows looked on dispassionately.

"Well, if you have nothing better to do—" and the man shrugged his shoulders, "do you see that big man on the gangway? Ask him—he rules the roost here."

Camille saw the individual indicated. He was leaning on one of the hatches smoking a pipe, and between half-closed eyes was watching the labourers come and go. Camille picked his way among the

labyrinth of men and vehicles, and ran up one of the planks that was unoccupied at the moment. The man saw him coming and turned indolently.

"Well?" he asked.

Camille squirmed beneath the harsh look that accompanied the query.

"I am out of work," he quavered; "one of the men down there sent me to you."

There was no immediate answer, except a scorching glance from the cruel eyes.

"Indeed?" said the equally cruel voice at length. "May I ask you if your clothes are grown on to your body?"

"Why?" asked Camille, astounded at the strange question.

"Simply, my boy, because, when one comes to ask a favour, one comes cap in hand—manners above everything."

With a swift movement he stretched out his hand and knocked off Camille's headcovering. Without a word the lad stooped to pick it up, and stood twirling it in his finger. The sun stabbed him as with flaming daggers.

The man watched him a little while, and burst into a laugh.

"You will do," he said; "pray excuse this little experiment of mine. You see, the work here plays the devil with one's nerves. I am extremely irritable, and unless my subordinates fall in with my little whims and humours there might be friction."

Camille winced again; the words sounded as if they were uttered at the very edge of the teeth.

"You will be satisfied with me," he said quietly.

"That's right, my boy; you must do your work

unquestioningly—like a machine. The men whose brains or whose luck reach no further than this have no right to be anything but machines.”

Camille tried hard to fathom if the man spoke only in well-meant rebuke of the lad or in withering scorn of himself.

“I shall not pretend to be anything but a machine while I am meant for one,” he said, doggedly.

“Only while you are meant for one? It will pay you better to be one always—cultivate the habit. Just get into the way of working without thought, sense, or feeling, till you are rusty, body and soul, and they put you in the great lumber-room, where it won’t matter whether you lived by clockwork or by your own force and will; you go to pieces all the same.”

He interrupted himself with a short laugh.

“Poor fellow, I am talking over your head; you don’t understand. Well, to change the subject. Come here to-morrow morning and start work in Rotillon’s gang, the red haired man whose brains I thought you were going to dash out before. I am a philanthropist; I never begrudge a man the chance of becoming a machine.”

Camille made his way up, dazed with the heat and the glare, and as he walked on he felt the man’s eyes on his back. Probably he was saying again:

“Poor country booby, he does not understand.”

Did not understand? Did it not pay better to live without a soul? Would it not be preferable to be swineherd-in-ordinary to the village magnates among the Normandy dung-heaps? Would it not have been more profitable to have married Widow Fluquette? Would it not be more to his interest to have slaughtered Touchepas’ cattle, and in due time to become a master butcher? For these things one only needed to

be a machine. And then he thanked God that he had been given the power of thought and feeling, that his lot had been rife with suffering to prove to him how greatly he possessed them, to show him that he thought and felt and lived. Oh! one could put a wonderful amount of intelligence and sympathy into stone-breaking and barrow-carting.

When he reached the hut, he found Krantz stretched full length on the straw mattress.

"Hullo," he yawned, "too sweaty for work; Touchepas has given you a half-holiday, eh?"

"He has given me a long holiday," smiled Camille, sitting down and drying his forehead.

"What?" Krantz became serious. "Have you left him?"

"Yes, dismissed in disgrace; haven't enough genius for a slaughterer—a simple calf is too much for me."

"H'm," reflected Krantz, "that's bad. I wonder what you can take to now?"

"I don't wonder—I know."

"Yes?" asked Krantz, expectantly.

"River-quarrying," said Camille briefly.

Krantz sat up as if a hornet had stung him.

"You must be jesting," he gasped.

"As a joke it would be too coarse; you must therefore take it in earnest," was the quiet answer.

There was a pause. Krantz looked at Camille curiously.

"Have you ever committed murder?" he asked suddenly.

"No," and Camille smiled, amused at the idea of his taking human life, in view of the day's events.

"Then is there any other reason why you wish to take your purgatorial penance in advance?" continued Krantz.

"No, I shall leave that to the proper authorities. It's no good, Krantz; you can't shake me from my purpose. My mind's made up; I start to-morrow."

"Was there nothing else?" asked Krantz gloomily.

Camille shrugged his shoulders. "What else should there be? You forget the last time I was out of employ I measured the length and breadth of Paris and could find nothing. This is a lucky accident."

"Lucky accident?" growled Krantz; "is that what your luck is made of?"

"It seems so—the man there, some martinet of an overseer, didn't think much of it either. But he mentioned brains in the same connection. I can see now what he meant," he mused; "a man who time after time batters his head full tilt against the obstacles in his way can't have much brains left to speak of. He seems to be right. I haven't half the ideas I had when I first came here. I must hurry up and do something before I lose these as well. What can I do? Work? Well then—let it be work."

There was no bitterness in his tone; his words were dispassionate, as if they did not concern him at all.

Krantz listened, expecting him to proceed. Then he got up, walked over to Camille, and held out his hand.

"What's that for?" asked the latter.

"For showing yourself a man," was the reply. "It's a poor reward, isn't it? Unluckily I can't give any other."

"I haven't deserved anything," said Camille, grasping it.

"Why, it's enough to restore one's faith in the world, to hear you talk like this. Not that it will do ~~me~~ much good; I ~~am~~ too far gone for anything.

But I ought to have known you before I got as far down the hill as I have."

"Is it too late now?" asked Camille earnestly.

"I am afraid so—at least I want a good strong lever, stronger than you can provide."

"Then what will you do?"

"Sit still—for the present at least—and look on as you go ahead. I'll pass the time in prophesying."

"Prophesying what?"

"Your success; and if your particular idea of success is money, you will one day be a millionaire. I laughed at you once; but that was before I knew you."

"One day," smiled Camille, "when they start digging gold from the flints on the riverside. Don't apologise—you see I laugh at myself now."

"Then it will come in some other way."

"It will come—it must," cried Camille starting up excitedly, "if I dig myself to the bottom of the grave for it. But before the clods smother me, I must feel what life is—I must hold it in my hands and see it quivering, palpitating, not dead, not inert with the death-sleep of suffering. I must know that I breathe in the sunlight—if only for a breath's duration."

Krantz was silent. This was the first time that he had seen this patient soul uprear itself rebelliously; there was something terrifying in this turning of the trodden worm.

Camille ceased striding up and down, and stopped suddenly before Krantz.

"Tell me one thing, Krantz; you say you know me—you have watched and measured me day by day through all these months of soulless mechanical

drudgery. I can't trust myself to judge. Have I fallen off?"

"In what?"

"In the qualities that make men human?"

"I told you you were a man—does not that imply everything? No, you have not fallen off."

"I knew it" cried Camille exultantly. "I knew he was lying—he said I should become a mere machine. I shall plod, I shall toil—but that? Never, never!"

The night seemed interminable to Camille. With the dawn he was up, and straightway made for the quays. There were several hours to wait for the commencing of work, but his presence on the scene allayed the impatience which tingled through him from head to foot. At last the gangs began to assemble, and soon afterwards he saw Rotillon coming up, and accosted him.

"I am to work with your gang," he said.

"The devil you are," replied the red-haired man politely.

"The devil knows nothing about it; the man on the gangway gave me orders to that effect yesterday," he said quietly.

"Then there is a devil in the case," was the answer. "You don't know Monsieur Pitoignac—wait till he shows the cloven hoof. Take my advice and clear out of this, my son, unless you want your heart crushed out of shape."

"I am not afraid—my heart isn't made of wax."

An angry look came over Rotillon's face. He muttered something between his teeth, and Camille thought the remark contained a certain reference to a blockhead.

"In the last fortnight," said the red-haired man

aloud, "two men died of sunstroke, one man turned a raving lunatic, another broke his spine."

"Then you seem to have a fair share of excitement in the place," replied Camille easily; "I don't mind—I have good nerves."

He could not make out what the fellow was driving at. He was evidently very determined, for some mysterious reason, on frightening him away; his words did not have the ring of pure, disinterested goodwill.

The other members of the gang came up—five in all. Rotillon turned to them.

"Our new colleague," he said, pointing to Camille.

The announcement did not evoke much enthusiasm; wherever Camille turned he encountered black looks.

"When do you start?" asked one of them.

"At once—this morning," replied Camille.

"If I were you I should put it off for a few days," suggested the man, "and in the time I should give myself a good rest. The work is terrible—especially for a youngster like you. There's a good boy, go away—look round the town, enjoy yourself, and come again in a week."

Camille was getting angry. What right had these men to interfere with his work? Did they think he was taking the bread out of their mouth? Surely there was enough for all to do; one pair of hands more or less—what did it count?

"I don't see why I should," he said sturdily; "I feel strong and fit. It's my own business as much as yours whether I want to work or idle."

"Very well, then," said Rotillon, sullenly; "just as you please; but don't say we haven't warned you. Come, boys, there's the bell from the gangway."

As if by magic, the scene changed. The idle, gos-



siping groups divided ; faces that had just smiled carelessly became set and hard, the laughs and jests died away, as though the energy wasted on mien and utterance could not be spared from the toil of the day. From the gangway loomed the saturnine figure of Pitoignac, like the shadow of doom.

Camille took quickly to his work ; he watched the others, and did what they did. It was very simple : they shivered the stones, piled them into the hand-barrows, and in slow procession carted them up the creaking plank to send the contents headlong in the wide yawning abyss. Then they went back to the quarry, shivered more stones, wheeled them up and down, and came back again, in never-changing routine. Camille saw that his companions bore with him grudgingly ; but they had no cause for making complaint. He did his work at least as well as they ; he never resorted to padding his barrow halfway with sand and stone splinters to make it lighter. Now and then there was an interchange of whispered conversation when they thought Camille was out of earshot. But once he overheard Rotillon mutter to Carocco, the Spaniard :

"We must not risk it ; remember all that depends on it. Let us have patience."

Gradually Camille became aware that they had some secret amongst them, and that it was on this account that they feared and disliked his presence. Well, whatever it was, it was no concern of his ; but he could not help seeing that they all hated Pitoignac with a deadly hatred.

"He would not let me go home when they told me my wife was dying," Rotillon once happened to say.

"That time when I lay fainting for an hour," said

another, with a curse, "he took off my whole day's wages for shirking. My children starved all the next day."

There was no doubt that Pitoignac deserved their hatred. There was not a man among his underlings for whom he had not a gibe or sneer. For some time he took no notice of Camille, but on the sixth day, as the lad was passing him close with his barrow, he said :

"Well, M. Fin-de-la-queue—Mr. Tail-end—I am glad you have found your vocation ; you break stones very cleverly—as if you were born to it."

Camille's head drooped with impotent shame, but he made no answer.

"Yes," continued Pitoignac, "it is a noble vocation ; exercises the muscles, especially of the head. Capital training for becoming a great man—an ambassador at least."

"I never thought of becoming ambassador," said Camille, keeping a tight hold on himself.

"Didn't you ?" asked Pitoignac, in mock surprise. "Then what will become of Europe and its international interests ? They have been waiting for a master-hand to put them straight, and now—get on with your work, you idling vagabond, and don't stand here arguing with me."

This was rather inconsequential conduct on the part of M. Pitoignac, but Camille got used to it ; and lucky it was that he did, for the overseer measured it out to him with no sparing hand. One day, in a burst of confidence, he told him the reason.

"You see, Fin-de-la-queue, these other fellows are hogs and logs, and if I call them so it makes no difference to them, except that they are put to the

trouble of cursing me under their breath. But you seem to take an intelligent interest in my little pleasantries, and for all your putting a stolid face on them, you can't help those little twitches at the corners of your mouth. I am sure you hate me more than all the rest."

"I have no cause to hate you," said Camille, looking him full in the face.

"Then you are either the long-sufferance of God in disguise, or the most conceited rascal that ever trundled a barrow—the latter probably. You don't think me good enough to be hated? I tell you, my boy, before we two are done, I shall make you hate me."

Pitoignac was as good as his word; but to all the petty indignities, all the scathing contempt, Camille remained imperturbable. His tormentor had shown his hand, and therefore it was easy to foil him.

Camille was determined to give no cause for being sent adrift again. As he had told Krantz, he had made desperate efforts to find work. Rebuffs everywhere—at most, a procrastinatory promise that came to nothing; he could not risk that again. True, there was little aim and object in stone-breaking, it led only as far as the insatiable cargo-hold, and to get to it one had to run the gauntlet of Pitoignac's stinging tongue. But, at any rate, it tided over the present, and the future seemed so far off that it need not be reckoned with just yet. And it was only fitting that, in addition to tribulation of body, one should have vexation of mind. It was best these things should run in parallels—it preserved the equilibrium of the system.

As the methodical persecution of Pitoignac became more apparent, the gang's prejudice against Camille abated.

"Did I not tell you he was a devil?" remarked Rotillon one day.

"I never look on his face without pitying him," replied Camille soberly.

Rotillon nearly dropped his mattock on his toes; then he swore.

"Are you mad? Pity him, did you say?"

"Yes. Why not? It's not his own fault. I sometimes think when he rages he is more angry with himself than with us. He has the look of a man who has striven for much, and has fallen short."

Rotillon looked blank.

"I don't understand you," he said; "I never look at him without feeling like strangling him. I tell you what it is, my boy—you are a milksop."

"No more a milksop than you are a hero for blustering behind his back," was the sedate answer. "I am just as well off by not making so much fuss over what can't be helped."

"Can't be helped!" whispered Rotillon. "Do you know when the man before Pitoignac was here we got nearly double the wages we get now? If they must appoint another, the good old times may come back again."

"I should certainly like more wages," admitted Camille; "but I don't see what we can do to get an increase."

"Don't you?" said Rotillon cunningly. "Ah, my boy, we can do more than bluster. We had arranged a nice little plan, and had it not been for your arrival . . ."

He broke off significantly. In a flash Camille saw it all—the distrust with which he had been treated, their annoyance at his presence. So this was the

reason: he had been the cog in the wheel. And now that he had been lashed with the same whip, they thought they might venture to hint at their secret and presume on his silence. He almost laughed to think of the irony of fate which, unconsciously to both, had made the slave the providence of his driver. And then it struck him suddenly that he must either go with these men and stain his hands with crime, or go against them and live in fear of his life. He knew too much, and if he wished to be safe, had to dissemble his knowledge.

"What difference did my coming make to you?" he asked in apparent wonder. "You might have gone on just the same; you were about to make a petition of some sort, I suppose?"

"Yes, a petition," said Rotillon, catching at the suggestion; it had just come upon him that he might have said too much. "We were going to ask him for higher wages, and we did not know whether to include you or not. That upset our arrangements."

"It was very good of you to take me into consideration at all; but don't let me be an obstacle. Make your petition, and leave me out."

"Very good; we shall make it in a day or two."

But a day or two passed, and, as Camille expected, there was no movement to approach Pitoignac, and Camille took very good care not to comment on it or to remind Rotillon of his intention. The latter became very circumspect in his references to the overseer; he despised Camille heartily for a thick-headed idiot, and complimented himself on his tact in having refrained from compromising himself.

Camille wondered why and how his presence had crossed their purpose so effectually. He was nearly

three weeks in the place, and all the time they must have been chafing under the restraint. If he went away to-morrow Pitoignac might be a dead man, and Camille prayed that the man might not be tempted to do anything which might turn his guardian angel into a would-be assassin with the rest. And therefore he kept his annoyance less under cover, because his stoic indifference had only served to infuriate Pitoignac. But he never gainsaid the tyrant; in fact, he answered him only when it was expected of him.

Camille had fully made up his mind on that; but, of course, he reckoned without making allowance for special circumstances. One day, just as he was pausing for breath close to the base of the quay-rampart, he heard his name called. He knew the sweet silvery voice even if he had not looked whence it came. Bending over the parapet stood Fifine, smiling and nodding, with her hair fluttering like pennons, looking cool and dainty. Camille suddenly remembered that when he saw her last, two days ago, she had promised to pay him a visit and bring him a present.

"Where did you hide yourself, you silly boy?" she cried. "I had to look at all these ugly men before I caught sight of you—pooh! you look as unwashed as the others."

"One can't look very tidy and do this sort of thing at the same time," said Camille, his pickaxe clicking away busily.

She watched him thoughtfully for a moment.

"You know what, Camille?" she said, speaking with conviction, as if she had weighed the matter well. "I like you ever so much better when I see you hard at work like this than when you lounge about, clean and idle."

"I like myself better, too," he replied, looking round to see if the others were listening, but beyond the first upward glance of curiosity they showed no interest in the speakers. Camille, however, had an uneasy idea that Pitoignac was watching him, and so he was glad when Fifine said :

"I can't stop now ; here is your present—catch."

It was a magnificent rose, fragrant and full-blown, and it seemed like a breath from a cool mountain-stream in this stony wilderness. Carefully Camille put it into his blouse. It seemed to work like a talisman, sending a current of joy and hope through his heart, electrifying it with a sense of gladness and exultation, of which his life before had never had a presentiment. And somehow he felt that it was not due so much to the gift as to the giver. From that moment she had entered into his life, making it sweeter and more full of new-born promise. And, as with every new birth, it contained something of travail—a delicious, luxuriant pain, in which he revelled. The granite blocks seemed to sunder of their own accord, scarcely needing the touch of the pick, and his barrow went up the plank as though requiring scarcely more than a breath to give it motion.

At the ascent he saw Pitoignac's eyes fixed on him curiously.

"There, there," he said, "who would have thought Fin-de-la-queue a ladies' man ?"

Camille blushed scarlet.

"She is quite a little girl—the daughter of a friend of mine," he stammered.

"How interesting ; by the way, what have you there in your blouse that you are taking such good care of ?"

"Oh, it's nothing."

"How nothing? I saw you pick it up and stow it away solicitously, like something very valuable. It looked red."

"It was a rose," said Camille desperately.

"But I must see it—it might be something contra-band."

"I assure you—" began Camille.

"Assurance be hanged," cried Pitoignac; "I have eyes of my own and I want to see for myself—out with it!"

"No," said Camille firmly.

Pitoignac lifted his brows. "No? Who says no? I command you."

"It's my property; you have no right to meddle with it."

"We shall see who is master here," hissed Pitoignac. In a flash he had thrown himself on Camille, had torn open his blouse, and was holding the rose in his hand before Camille could grasp what was happening.

"You ought to feel easier," laughed Pitoignac. "I have taken a load off your bosom. You can move about more freely now; it—won't—interfere—with—your—work."

With each of the last words he plucked out the petals of the flower, and then threw the naked stalk at Camille's feet. The latter turned white, clenched his teeth, and then catching hold of his barrow followed the rest of the gang quietly back to the quarry.

The others looked at him curiously. They were used to the overseer's outbursts, but anything so unprovoked, so fiendishly malicious, they had never witnessed.



"Do you still pity him?" whispered Rotillon.

"How did you intend to do it?" asked Camille, without raising his head.

"Do what?"

"Kill him."

Rotillon started back. "So you knew all along?"

Camille nodded.

"Well, considering you knew and kept quiet," said Rotillon, after a pause, "We may as well make free with you."

Camille nodded again impatiently.

"Have you noticed a habit he has of standing against the gangway rail every afternoon when he comes back from his five o'clock nip of absinthe?"

"I have."

"The ends of that part of the rail are fastened into sockets with pinbolts. Take out the bolts and the first man who leans against that rail goes crashing down over-side into the water; and if he isn't a good swimmer, and has moreover a glass or two up his head—well, that is the last of him."

"And how was it I stopped you?" asked Camille.

"You see," said Rotillon, becoming more and more confidential, "the pins can't be drawn in less than one or two minutes; and as you are always with us, it could not be done without attracting your attention. And if you had rounded on us red-handed, it meant servitude for life to some of us."

Camille smiled contemptuously. It was a pitiful contrivance, clumsy and obvious, but there was no doubt that it would serve its purpose. So be it then; let things take their course. It was a human life, but it was the life of a demon, one of such as make the unhappiness of their fellow-beings their sport and

diversion. There was no reason why the tables should not be turned, and they be made sport of occasionally.

"I am with you, heart and soul," he said, furtively grasping Rotillon's hand; "when is it to be?"

"To-day—now—look, he is just going away; we can set his trap during his absence."

"As soon as possible. Do the other gangs know?"

"Not a soul; they are either cowards or blockheads. Myself and Carocco—we both jingled irons in the same galley—thought of it one evening, and gradually got our gang made up of men we could trust. It was to have been done on the very day you came."

Pitoignac was striding insolently through the toiling groups. Everywhere he was given plenty of elbow-room, and there was a conscious smile on his face, as if he knew he was wading knee-deep in their hatred, and enjoyed it.

Camille followed him with his eyes as far as he could.

"I have never seen a dying man," he said, as though he owed someone an explanation.

"Let us get our work done," said Rotillon, a little pale.

"Yes, let us get it done," echoed Camille.

The unloading-stage was empty; the gangs had ten minutes' respite during the overseer's absence; just time enough for a draught of the distilled vinegar they called wine, and a few curses concerning the hardness of their lot.

"Pitoignac would be pleased if he saw how industrious we are,—actually working over-time," said Camille, grimly.

The others laughed, a forced laugh, and grasping their barrows wheeled them towards the planks.

"Pitoignac's funeral procession," remarked Camille again, when they had got half way. "Let us start the 'De profundis.'"

The others laughed in response, although none of them knew what he meant.

So they reached the top, shot their load, and then stood looking at each other questioningly. Who would take upon himself what had to be done now?

With an oath, Carocco stepped to the rail, and rattled at the sockets.

"You have a try, Rotillon; the pins sit tight, and my wrists are not very strong," he said, after an attempt or two.

Rotillon in his turn fumbled at the bar, but his hand shook nervously.

"Quick," cried Camille, "they will be wondering what we are doing here so long."

"Then do it yourself," said Rotillon sullenly.

With a bound Camille sprang to the rail, and with one wrench had snapped the pin at the one end into pieces. Then quick as thought he replaced the bar into the unsecured socket. At the slightest contact the bar-end would slip and—yes, things would be as they should. •

They went back to their station and waited.

Camille thought that never in his life had he done so much waiting, and yet he knew that the time was to be counted only by minutes. It was to him as though he had hated the man for years, as though the sole and single desire of his life had been to choke the eternal sneer from those supercilious lips. Involuntarily he looked at his hands; he thought they must have turned into talons—there was a ravenous, devouring greed of blood in them that could only belong to

a beast of prey. The same itch, too, was tingling in his heart, making it insensate with the madness and thirst of vengeance. Yes, he would kill his enemy—even if that meant plucking from his soul the wings wherewith alone it could fly up into heaven.

And then suddenly—he knew not what happened; he felt a momentary stab and throb—something like what the pain that came from his mutilated soul might be. Would it really ache like that, and was the agony that had nearly annihilated him with but one moment's duration to continue all his life time? Would it make him gasp like that—would it make his blood run cold, congealing it into a thousand needles of ice, that punctured him inside with a thousand little wounds? No doubt, that was what people meant by hell—to be everlastingly pierced and spitted by these innumerable, infinitesimal stings, to spend one's time in plucking them from the puckered sores, only to find two springing up where one had been before. What had he been tempted to? What was the price he was willing to pay for quickly quenching the strawblaze of his hatred, which, if he only waited, would burn itself out in its own due time? And now what was coming over him? His resolve that had but now seemed so just in its strength, was now futile as a soap bubble. Could he undo what he had done? He looked up quickly—it was too late. He saw a stir among the groups at the further end, and a moment later Pitoignac came in sight, walking to his doom, with a heavy step, and with each stride Camille thought he was planting his foot on his heart and brain, trampling out all power of thought or speech or action.

And so he stood, rooted to the spot, thinking nothing, feeling nothing—only vaguely guessing, that

the figure which passed on there was dragging the eyes out of his head as it moved further and further ; and when it disappeared, it would take his sight with it, and leave him staring darkly into fathomless blindness. And still the man passed on, with hardly a swerve, as if his destiny had yoked him between its shafts, and were driving him straight into eternity. He saw his victim approach the plank, traverse it slowly—saw him stop to light his pipe, and go direct to the treacherous rail—his death trap. Now it must come—now or the next moment ; Camille shut his eyes, his lips twitched convulsively, around him he heard the stertorous breathing of his accomplices—and suddenly there broke on the air a quick short cry, swallowed up by a choking gurgle. And with the cry he felt the spell that was on him relax its hold. With the leap of a panther he bounded through the confusion-stricken groups ; across the plank, across the breadth of the deck where the dislocated rail yawned wide—and, with a hasty glance into the depth below, leapt down, struck out strongly for the plunging body, which the tide had already taken in its grip, and caught it just as the waves were sucking it down for the last time.

Two or three minutes after, he was again on board, helped up by many hands, and Pitoignac's head was resting on his knees. And when the tired, weary eyes opened and looked about them in eloquent wonder, a shiver ran through Camille's body, and somewhere in the air there was a rustle of wings, and thousand voices were saying :

“ Not a murderer, thank God—not a murderer ! ”

## CHAPTER NINTH

### *CONFLICTS*

“. . . I am very glad to hear that Babette is looking after you so well. Tell her if she did not, I should cut her skin into strips and flog her with them—only, don't smile when you say it. Are you telling me the truth about your cough, that it is easier, and that the shooting pains come less often? Somehow, when I look at your writing, it seems your hand trembles more and more, that you make a great effort to keep it steady and prevent it from telling me tales; and your letters are so short, they seem penned in spurts and gasps. Dear, dear father, if you have need of me, do not keep me in ignorance of it. I have asked you the question a dozen times; your answer is always the same: 'I am well. Remember your purpose.'

“Do I remember it? Wherever I stand, wherever I walk, I see before me a stoop-shouldered haggard-faced greybeard, tottering along the rain-soaked high-road to the draughty stable they have disguised into a schoolroom, and there racking his lungs to the blood—I shudder, father, as I think of it: one day the strain may become too great, and then . . .

“And when that thought comes into my mind, I feel a whirlwind in my feet that would carry me through the air to your side. But I am in exile, I

may not return till my task here is completed—till I can come to you and say: 'This and this I have achieved; it is enough and ample for us both.'

"And that I shall accomplish it I am determined, if I must scale the very heavens or descend to the deepest pit to wrest it from the future. I feel in me strength for anything. I know what is at stake. Courage, courage, father! We shall yet talk of these days with tears of joy. We shall revel in their remembrance. We shall look back into their gloom to feast our eyes doubly on the sun of happiness which shall shine over our heads.

"I forgot to say how I came by the seventy-one francs I send. Only twenty-one are of my savings. Two months ago our overseer slipped overboard, and as I was nearest at the time, it fell to my chance to save him. Yesterday he remembered the fact and gave me fifty francs. I think you will make them welcome. You must buy warm clothes for the winter, and a bottle of Bordeaux. Drink it to the account of the future, which, as you know, is the largest wine cellar in the world. But above and beneath all—courage, courage!"

Camille paused to read over what he had written, and his face clouded. The letter rang false in its exaggerated attempt at reassurance that found no echo in his heart. Would it deceive the old man, with its extravagance of diction, its forced cheerfulness; would he mistake the words, that cried aloud in their despair, for a paean of hope and victory? "Wrest it from the future!" That was walking on stilts. How soon would it be before he must come to the ground and make confession of the sad and sober truth? It was so hard to play the hypocrite

to the one human being from whom he might expect unadulterated solace—on whose shoulder he might lay his weary head for one moment and cry away his heart's heavy hopelessness, and then start the fray again unburdened. No, he must lock it up in his bosom, and let none of it ooze out, so as not to embitter still more that other life, which had already drunk so deep of the wormwood of its lot.

With a sigh that seemed to wrench away half his soul, he finished the letter, took up his cap, and rushed into the open. He dreaded the company of his own thoughts. In the daytime, when he was breaking stones, and felt their onset, he lifted his pickaxe higher and struck with double strength, as if his thoughts had changed into stones and could be shattered to atoms likewise. He was still at the quarry; the conspiracy had achieved nothing—things were as before. Pitoignac was uncowed; he still bullied and blustered, his men still cursed, only they included Camille in their imprecations. The examination into the accident had revealed nothing; it was ascribed to the pin of the bolt having become rust-eaten. Pitoignac showed no increase of cordiality in his attitude to Camille for having saved his life. When he gave him the fifty francs, he said:

"My carcase is worth two louis at the anatomical schools—here is the amount. I hate being under an obligation; we are quits."

So Camille had worked on, earning his bread in the sweat of his brow, and eating it quickly, before it had time to choke him.

Yes, things were tolerable in the daytime, when they meant just so much straining of muscle and sinew. But in the evening, when the girth and



import of the work came to be measured, when he added it to the sum total of his life, and found that the day had been only another zero, and that to-morrow would again be another, he almost grew frightened at the impotence that battered on his strength—a devouring monster that fed and fed without being satisfied. Occasionally he sought oblivion in his books—a few tattered volumes, relics of his martyrdom at Madame Fluquette's. But as often as not the antidote refused its work, and he went on skimming the pages without mastering them, because of his one pre-occupying thought—like a man who has taken an opiate against his complaint, and has not taken enough, so that the gnawing pain eats on in numbed, sullen anger at the attempt to kill it. And sometimes his grief broke out rebelliously, as it broke out to-night, as it always did when he wrote to his father. For it was then that he laid his finger on the sorest spot in his heart, and felt it leap as though seared with a hot iron.

The last few weeks he seemed to have lived in utter solitude, forlorn and companionless. At the quarry he was boycotted; but more, he got an impression that Krantz and he were becoming strangers. One day he had taxed him with it openly, and Krantz looked guilty.

"I thought I was doing you a favour," he said.

"By depriving me of your society, of you, one of the very few people with whom I feel at ease?"

Krantz looked at him hard.

"And you really do that, really and conscientiously?" he asked at length.

"I believe so," replied Camille, almost in a whisper.

"Then, if you deceive yourself, you can't deceive

me," said Krantz, his hand on the lad's shoulder. "Camille, you are an open book to me. I have seen you smile when you would rather have cried; you have worn an air of indifference with a hurricane of emotions raging inside you. I have watched you read your father's letters and count your savings. Scold me for a spy."

"I don't think of you as a spy; I could easily have prevented your spying."

"Well, then, what was your reason for putting your face under a mask and your feelings into a strait-waistcoat? Was it to spare *my* feelings? You knew it would pain me to see you unhappy and discontented, and you wished to escape from my platitudes and commonplaces of consolation. You were quite right. They would only put you to the trouble of thanking me, and we should both be dissatisfied for having wasted our breath."

Camille made a gesture of dissent; but Krantz took no notice of it, and went on:

"I know when the best-intentioned sympathy becomes an infliction. There are some men who fight their battles best in a mouse-hole, because if they fall, they can hide there and no one will be the wiser whether they have ever fought. You are one of them, Camille. A man sometimes measures the friendship of his friends by the distance they keep."

Camille wondered, was Krantz right? Was this perhaps the first step in the degeneration which he had apprehended, and against which Krantz himself had reassured him not so long ago? Was he indeed acquiring the fatal habit of shrinking jealously into himself, of crumpling his soul into a nutshell, where it would lie quivering and straining to expand all that

was God-born in it? Perhaps this self-sufficiency was but the outcome of his solitary boyhood, when the dumb creations of nature were his world, when he locked up their secrets in his bosom, because they were too great, too beautiful to share with anyone. And therefore he did the same with his own secrets, which to him were invested with a beauty and greatness of their own—with the common motive of all that was human, the motive of pain. And, moreover, his griefs, his disappointments, were hallowed through the sacredness of their cause, the cause of filial love; they could not be divulged except at the risk of desecration.

No, he need not be afraid; they would never make him a pariah, cast off by all who wished him well—because they wished him well. True, misfortune soured him, made him undesirable of contact; but that would mend and end as soon as his prospects grew brighter. God be thanked, he knew he was not all in all to himself, that his joy and pain were not of his own making and unmaking. And what was the strongest proof? It was that subtle, mysterious longing for another living being, not of his flesh and blood, as was his father, but something quite strange, and yet unspeakably familiar. And that something had eyes young with primeval light, wondering eyes, that gazed on him so wise in their wonder, marvelling perhaps at their own glory, as did the newly-welded heavens. And sometimes he fancied they looked at him with a special message, that said: "You are unhappy, but I cannot help you, because I do not understand your unhappiness." He would go to look into these wonderful eyes.

Obedying the spur of the sudden resolution, that

called to him clear and strong from amid the tumult of his thoughts, he hastened his step through the roaring, bellowing streets, undiverted by the myriad sights and sounds that flashed on his senses. Men and women sat at the open-air tables, and laughed and drank; they were so many shadows to him, apparitions from a world of which he neither knew nor cared to know anything. They were of a mechanism different to his own; he wondered if in some way they were more complete than he, and had the faculty of laughing with their hearts as well as with their lips. So he went on, following the bent of his desire, and before he realised it, found himself in the grimy little street near the Porte St. Denis, which had latterly played such an important part in his geography of the world, where lay the fulcrum which might lift earth nearer to heaven.

He stopped before Ricotte's dwelling. The third storey was alight, and he knew he would find there Ricotte and Krantz—and probably someone else. He had done the same thing on many an evening before; he had sauntered into the street, had stopped in front of the house, had seen the light in the third storey—and had turned back again to the solitary hut and waited for Krantz's return. And when Krantz came he was always in bed, pretending to be asleep. Once or twice he had noticed Krantz stand cautiously, with shaded candle, by his bed, look at him closely, and then turn back to his own with a shoulder-shrug—something that implied half contempt, half pity. He could not prevent Krantz from pitying him. But to-night, he knew not why, his soul revolted against this pity; he felt its humiliation and resolved not to risk it again. The next time Krantz

would look at his sleeping features they should be calm and peaceful as those of an angel who has sinned and who has at length achieved his redemption.

And in the meantime he was standing sentry outside the house as usual. Why did he not go up? He must make an end of the foolish fancy which so long had kept him, like a spell, from crossing the threshold, the presentiment of evil, the undefinable dread of impending calamity. What had he to fear—whom had he to fear? Was it those wonderful eyes? True, they were terrible in their power, because they were unconscious of it; but he must subdue his cowardice, before it succeeded in subduing him. He must practise to look into them without a tremor; he must go to meet the danger half way and intercept it. "I am not afraid—not afraid," he was saying to himself as he mounted the stairs, till he reached the door and tapped for entrance.

Ricotte opened, and started back in affected surprise.

"Then you aren't dead and buried after all," he said; "Krantz swore you were not, but I wouldn't believe him."

Camille stepped in with a smile of pleasure at the implied heartiness of the welcome. His first glance showed him Krantz seated in the wooden arm chair, and Fifine on a stool at his feet with her head on his knees. For a moment he felt a twinge of disappointment that was more displeasure, the feeling of a man who sees a thing which he would like to own whole, shared or appropriated by another. But that was followed by a blending of remorse and self-ridicule for a thought so foolish and reprehensible—Krantz and Fifine, where was his common-sense? And the remorse again was followed by something he could not understand at all;

it came from Fifine's upturned face, went straight to his heart and nestled there, sweet and warm and clinging, as though it never intended going away again. It also came from her voice as she said :

"Is it really you? I wonder you have the impudence to show yourself here."

"Yes, it is some little time since I came last," admitted Camille.

"Some little time?" That's a story; it was ages and ages ago, why, the very day I brought you my rose. You came that evening—to thank me, you said, with your clothes all muddy, your hair matted and straggling . . ."

"I remember," interrupted Camille, a little disconcerted.

"When you talked, you talked nonsense," she went on relentlessly, "and when you were quiet, you looked it; in fact, you were very queer altogether. You said you had fallen into the river—did you fall into the river to-day?"

"No—why?"

"Because you only seem to come when you do."

"Mustn't I come without?"

"Mustn't? Now he puts the blame on us, as if it were our fault. You are a wicked, wicked. . ."

"There, there," interposed Krantz; "don't scold him, little one. He works very hard, and is awfully tired at night. I always told you so when you asked."

"I never asked," cried Fifine with flashing eyes, "at least, I never meant to; it always slipped out unawares. But,"—her voice and look became softer—"you do work hard."

"How do you know?" asked Camille.

"I have watched you once or twice from the top

where you couldn't see me. It's terrible to go like this all day—isn't it?" And she swung her arms above her head in imitation of the men wielding their pick-axes.

"One gets used to it," said Camille.

"And to carting things up the plank?" she went on with her questioning. Then she sank her voice. "Do you know, I sometimes put stones in my basket just to make it feel heavy; it makes me think I am helping you push your wheelbarrow."

Camille listened, and the feeling that nestled at his heart seemed to stir and become alive.

"Then you ought to be tired," he said, controlling himself; "why do you stay up so late?"

"Do you call this staying up late?" she cried hotly. "It may be for the rich children—not for me."

"Why, what is the difference?" asked Camille smilingly.

"Simply that I haven't a governess, or some nuisance of that sort, to come to me just as I am beginning to like the lamplight—you know, I am always happier in the daytime—and say: 'Come to bed—do, there's a darling; your parents are rich and respectable, and you must do what is nice and proper.' Thank goodness I haven't always to do what is nice and proper."

She paused with a look of supreme disdain on her face. Camille glanced round in wonder at her outbreak.

"What does it all mean?" he asked, turning to Krantz.

"Just before you came in," said Krantz laughing, "Ricotte had mounted his hobby and was rough riding it, knocking over capitalists and monopolists, beating their brains out with their own moneybags,

upholding the nobility of the proletariat, and behaving like a rampant Sansculotte generally."

"It's not true," broke in Fifine vehemently; "father was just saying what he thought of the grand people in carriages, and he was saying such beautiful nasty things about them—it does one's heart good to listen to him."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Ricotte, who had been tramping the room evidently full of his subject and waiting for a chance to disgorge; "I'll tell you what it is: I am a man of the people, and I shall never be anything else, not if I had the finest opportunity in the world. It is the people who make and who are the country; it is your men of money who try their best to knock it out of shape. They have no idea of proportion. Their only object is to make things as unequal as they can; they upset the national equilibrium. I tell you wealth is not only a social crime but a political mistake."

"Excellent, excellent," laughed Krantz, as the other paused out of breath, "you will next be telling us that the poverty of a country is in proportion to the wealth of its individuals, and then you will give us statistics."

"Statistics be hanged," roared Ricotte. "I don't argue from dead type and paper, nor from neatly arranged columns of figures that talk to you in evening-dress and in a drawing-room whisper, and are not worth the ink with which they are written. No, I draw my convictions from living facts, from the breathing corpses that turn our streets into graveyards. My figures are the tattered women and children who cry aloud in their hunger and misery. The ink I would use to speak for me is the blood-sweat



in which these vampires dip their pens to write their cheques. One day they will use it to write their own death-warrants ; history repeats itself." \*

Krantz's laugh died off his face. He knew this was a question of life and death with Ricotte, and that he was not to be trifled with when he brought it on the *tapis*.

"But what can you do?" he asked, breaking the silence. "You know that wiser men than you have grappled with this puzzle, and have lost heart over the solution."

"That is what makes it so hopeless," replied Ricotte, bitterly. "They have all tried to unravel it, each in his own particular clumsy way, until they got it into this desperate tangle. Then they gave it up, and said, 'Impossible'; at every turn and corner they set up a signpost with the legend, 'Impossible,' and it meant: 'Go wherever you like you will come to the impossible.' That is how the word got into the dictionary of progress. One day the people will bring out a revised edition, in which the word, and every other that might be construed into its meaning, will be struck out; they will make a language of their own in which to plead and gain their cause."

"And in the meantime?" asked Krantz.

"In the meantime they shall accumulate faith in themselves. 'The people's voice—God's voice'; you know the adage. The people shall be their own god, and their belief in themselves shall be their salvation. No doubt we shall have apostates from the faith; now and then one will be lured into the temples of the gold worshippers. But as long as the people help themselves and one another they are secure. Not if my life depended on it, would I, for one, make common cause with the Judases."

"You talk as if they were offering you millions to do so," said Krantz, trying to give the conversation a lighter turn.

"I should lose all my self-respect," went on Ricotte, ignoring Krantz's flippancy. "I should feel like soiling my hands in human blood. Is not their money coined of blood and broken hearts and curses?"

"Ugh, father," said Fifine with a wry face, "I shall give up selling flowers."

"Why, dearie?" asked Ricotte, smiling and stroking her hair.

"Some of them might pay me for them in money that is all blood and curses—I don't like blood and curses."

"Don't be afraid, little one, there is no curse on the money earned by the honest labour of your hands. Your labour has baptised and exorcised the devil out of it."

"Do you see what you are doing?" said Krantz, shaking his finger at Ricotte. "You are making your daughter as bad as yourself."

"As bad as himself?" echoed Fifine indignantly. "As good, you mean, I suppose. Is there anything bad in hating what is wicked? Well, I hate the grand folks with my heart and soul."

"But they may not all be wicked," suggested Krantz.

"Then how are you to tell which is which?" said Fifine. "You can't take their word for it, and therefore you must hate them one and all to be on the safe side."

"What a little spitfire," mocked Krantz; "what, by the way, do you know of hating? You aren't made for it; your little heart has only just enough room for your flowers. You leave the hating business to us men, who can do it properly."

"And who says I can't do it properly? And if I can't, I'll practice by hating you."

She slipped away from him, dodging the arm which he stretched out to hold her back. Her father was still pacing the room in agitation, and there was no one to turn to but Camille. He had sat listening to their talk with a nameless feeling of dissatisfaction, which had kept his lips closed as with a vice. This was the first time that he had seen Ricotte's prejudice against the people of privilege flare up in all its fury. It pained and alarmed him to hear his thunderbolts launched so violently. But it seemed terrible to find them echoed by the sweet childish mouth that had made utterance so harshly, almost cruelly. And manifestly her words were no tutored repetition, nor the wayward ingenuousness of her youth. They had the ring of fixed unshakable conviction, of knowledge, of spontaneous purpose. And now he knew why he had kept silent; for if he had spoken, he must have told them that he thought differently of these things, and that would have been treason in Ricotte's eyes, and would have cost him his friendship. And Ricotte's friendship was very precious to him—not entirely for Ricotte's sake, he knew full well. So he had sat there thinking, with his thoughts half painted on his face.

"Why do you scowl?" asked Fifine, coming close to him.

"I don't know. Did I scowl?" he stammered, flushing.

It was the first occasion that he flushed when she spoke to him suddenly, and he wondered why it was.

"I was only trying to look serious," he added as an afterthought.

"Trying? You don't want much trying for that. Are you well—and happy?" she asked, with a shyness in the last word, as if she thought it presumptuous.

Camille looked up; Krantz and Ricotte were standing by the window at the further end.

"Are you?" he parried the question.

"Of course. Why not?"

"How do you do it?" he queried, with the solemn air of one consulting an oracle.

"I can't say, exactly; I think I have a different way each time, but mostly I do it by not wanting more than I can get."

He started. He seemed to hear the voice of his soul taking shape. It was the answer it had given him even before she had uttered hers.

"Some people can't do that," he said, almost sullenly.

"Can't? It's the easiest thing in the world. You just shut your eyes very tightly, and say: 'I can do without this, and this,'—you know whatever thing in particular you may have set your mind on. Then you say it once, twice, a thousand times. And if you don't believe yourself then, say it another thousand times. But it is best done in your idling time, because when you are selling flow—, I mean when you are hard at work, you don't think so much of what you miss."

Camille gnawed his lip. Was there a greater humiliation than to be shamed in one's philosophy by a child?

"Is that the way?—that is, is it always the way?" he asked.

"If you are in earnest," said Fifine soberly, and looking at him with great wondering eyes. "What, are you going?"

Camille was rising.

"Yes, Fifine," he said, holding both her soft little hands in his scarred and horny palm. "I am going to commence immediately. I shall come often, though, now. I shall want you to help me to count."

"You can do it much better by yourself," said Fifine, dubiously; "but, of course, you can come as often as you like—and oftener."

"I am going home, Krantz," called Camille, and he thought he had never heard his voice ring so clearly.

"Wait a bit—so am I," replied Krantz. "Good night, Ricotte! Good night, little one!"

The first thing Camille did when they had got into the street, was to ask:

"Is Ricotte really so inveterate and serious in his hatred of the classes?"

"Quite serious," said Krantz, with decision.

"And—Fifine?" His voice almost trembled on the words.

"More serious," said Krantz, with more decision.

That night Camille dreamt that Ricotte and Fifine had come down to the riverside with hand-barrows—Fifine's all wreathed in flowers—and were carting the whole of the world's treasures to the bottom of the river, whilst he himself stood looking down at them from the parapet, wringing his hands.

## CHAPTER TENTH

## *THE PIVOT OF CONSEQUENCES*

THE evening's events left a strong impression on Camille's mind, which the following days did much to accentuate. It helped him vastly to form more definitely his plan, his plan of life, that was to differ to the very roots from that which he had been pursuing.

"I am going to make a change," he informed Krantz, one evening, on their way home from Ricotte's.

"A change in what?"

"In everything."

"A highly laudable resolution," said Krantz, with every appearance of conviction. "You couldn't possibly——" He stopped short.

"I couldn't possibly change for the worse, you wanted to say," smiled Camille. "I have thought about it, and have come to the resolution that there is something wrong in my attitude towards life."

"It's not absolutely flawless," agreed Krantz, politely. "I could have pointed out to you some mistakes, only I thought it a waste of argumentative energy. No one owns to a mistake till he has proved himself wrong. Now for your recantation."

"You are quite right about the waste of argument," said Camille seriously. "You can't reason away a

man's feelings, not even with the best logic in the world."

"Well, and what has reasoned yours away?"

"My own experiences," said Camille, somewhat vague in his own mind as to what he meant by these. At any rate, he was glad when Krantz did not press him to specify them, for then he would either have to be evasive or to give great prominence to the teachings of his philosopher in short frocks. And to do that he felt strongly reluctant; it was like divulging a sweet secret that was shared only by the two of them, and served for a bond of comradeship.

"I have been pursuing a shadow, a *fata morgana*," he continued thoughtfully, "and I came near losing my youth, my hope—my soul, perhaps—in the chase. I was a fool; I journeyed through two years of my life as through a barren waste. I shall go back to the start, and strike out a different track."

"Thank goodness, you are calling yourself names," said Krantz, lifting his eyes to heaven mock-piously. "Now I am sure there is hope for you; you are acquiring a sense of the ridiculous."

"Ridiculous? So it may have appeared to you," said Camille, a little bitterly. "To me it was no laughing matter; and even now, though I seem to be passing through my process of regeneration so easily, I could cry—cry tears of vexation."

"Like a child that wants the moon, because it thinks it is a honey-cake."

"I have long ago found out that I was attempting the impossible," went on Camille, "that I was not sufficiently equipped for the conquest of which I had dreamt."

"Life is too wide awake for dreams—and dreamers,"

observed Krantz, as though he were the most practical man in the world.

"If you appreciated the motive that sent me on my errand, you would see why it is so hard for me to give up my dream."

"As far as your motive is concerned, I should say it has something to do with the old gentleman in Normandy ; so you have hinted."

"It is true. My father stands before and behind me : before, as the goal to which I am tending ; behind, as the impulse which pushes me forward, while I feel my feet rooted to the spot. I have been greedy, grasping for more than I had a right to expect. Perhaps you have despised me for it ; but, believe me, I was not selfish for myself, it was for my old father."

Krantz listened attentively, and then, instead of making reply, stopped still, and his features twitched as if a mighty struggle were going on in his brain.

"I have it," he cried at last, his play of mien subsiding now that the wave of reflection that caused it had passed on its way.

"The reason of your failure, I mean, theoretically speaking, at least," he replied, in answer to Camille's dumb enquiry. "Look here, my boy, I hate moralising ; it's as wicked as blaspheming, and most people don't know one from the other. But I have been trying to reduce your case to a rational statement, which might almost be embodied in a parable. People say fortune is blind ; that's where they make a mistake. Fortune is always on the look-out, and keeps her eyes wide open. It's the hunters of fortune who are blind ; they put a hood over their heads because then they can't perceive their own folly. Well, fortune sees



them coming with their nets, and, slippery jade that she is, dodges them here and there and everywhere; and all that the hunters get as a rule is hard knocks at the corners of the streets and curses from the people on whose toes they tread in their hurry. But what does the prudent man do? He sits at home quietly, keeps his eyes on his business. One fine morning fortune passes his way and says to herself: 'All right, I need not make a detour as I must for those other rascals; this fellow is much too busy with his own affairs to trouble about me'—and presto! he's got her by the skirts, and can make his own conditions before he lets her go."

"I don't say you are wrong, Krantz," replied Camille—"especially about the hard knocks; but sit at home and wait? That means plodding on in the same weary way, perhaps till all the villas down stream are built, and the riverside quarry has lost its occupation. And then I shall start looking for another Madame Fluquette or Monsieur Touchepas."

Krantz shrugged his shoulders. "You must bear it, and if you can't bear it by yourself, you must get some one to help you."

"Whom—what do you mean?" asked Camille quickly. He knew well what might help him; had Krantz, too, found it out already? But the answer that came was not the one that tallied with that of his thoughts.

"Send for your father," said Krantz. "You will feel more at peace with yourself; your purpose will be less divided. You will have more patience, having him in your sight, and knowing, at the worst, how much you must stint yourself, if his comfort requires it."

"That is against our compact at parting," said Camille gloomily; "he does not want to be a burden

to me, till I am myself set on firm foundations. No, he will not come before . . ."

"Before you can fetch him from the station in a carriage and pair, and take him to your mansion through a row of knee-bending retainers. You must get that nonsense out of his head. Write him urgently that he must come; and if the truth does not work—well, exaggerate a bit."

"Tell my father a lie?"

"Call it a pious fiction, if you think that sounds nicer."

"Yes, he shall come; let it be as you say," replied Camille quietly, after a minute's reflection. "But I shall write him everything—down to pin-point detail; it shall be the truth, if I must lacerate him with it. I shall tell him I have come on a fool's errand; the more I strive the more clearly I see my helplessness. All my plans prove abortive; every hope I have only goes to feed my despair. He must make up his mind to it: his son can at best be only a navvy, or bricklayer, or drudge of some sort; and unless he will share his life with him as such, it must be a separation till death."

Involuntarily his thoughts assumed a sullen tone, an undercurrent of resentment—against whom? Himself, perhaps? He could hardly tell—it was a numbed random feeling that seemed to know it had no right of existence and was ashamed of itself. Of course it was all nonsense what Krantz had said about mansions, carriages, and the other paraphernalia of wealth. His father was no lunatic, and indulged in no hallucinations. But all the same, it would be a cruel disillusion to the old man when his son would take him to the dingy hut, and say:

"This is all the home I can offer you ; it is only half mine, and that by charity. I shall put in a third truss of straw on which you can rest your aching limbs at night, if your cough is not too troublesome to Krantz. And in the daytime you can sit by the open door and watch the passers-by, while your son, in a labourer's blouse, is crushing stones at twelve francs a week. Look what a paradise you have come to !"

Aye, that was the bitter truth he would have to teach his father. But he would also tell him of the innumerable useless attempts he had made to obtain what his father might consider more gentlemanly employment. He would tell him how, only last week, he had offered himself for a vacant clerkship at a notary's, and how, when he had given his reference—the only reference he could boast of in the vast city—they had replied :

"Ricotte, you say—Emile Ricotte, the notorious demagogue and agitator ? You keep good company—altogether too good for us ; and therefore make haste and relieve us of yours."

He foresaw it all. The dumb, questioning eyes of his father fixed on him each time he came home from his work ; the reproach that rang out louder because it was unuttered ; the drab, colourless expectancy of better things that never came ; the short rations.

Camille stretched out his arms as he lay tossing sleeplessly on his bed that night, as though to ward off an army of horrors advancing upon him. But he saw no way out of it : his father must come. He had determined to give up the heart-breaking longing for success, for the realisation of his father's dreams, and to taste of the happiness that comes of striving within

the limits of one's strength. And in the meantime the old man was waiting to hear how their cause was prospering. Yes, their cause, which he was helping to his utmost by standing aside and giving the young, strong arm of his son full scope and sweep. And now he must be told that his abnegation was of no avail, that the fighter had become weary of the combat and had betrayed his trust. Well, then, let it be so ; let come what may. He would show his father the shoulders which sun and rain had stiffened to the hardness of parchment ; he would show him the knotted veins of his hands, with their palms scarred and furrowed by the fret of the pick-handle—and his father would forgive him.

He rose next morning with the intention of inditing the letter that evening. He sallied out early to work and walked on slowly, thinking hard how to couch his missive so as to give the old man a foreshadowing of the true state of things, and yet overrule his objections to joining him. It would need an amount of diplomacy to which Camille looked forward with apprehension. Was it not all of a piece with his life ? Wherever he turned he encountered difficulties ; even the being who loved him most had conspired, however unconsciously, to make things hard for him. The same resentful spirit as last night overcame Camille. For a moment he thought it might almost be construed into anger against his father, and he planted his footsteps more heavily on the ringing pavement, as if to trample the thought out of shape and form.

So he walked on with his eyes on the ground ; he would have found the way in his sleep. He had come to Notre-Dame, when he felt a commotion ahead of him, and lifting his gaze he saw that a small crowd

had gathered outside the Morgue, round a closed conveyance.

Camille stopped; he had plenty of time. Of course, he knew what it meant—some corpse had been picked up and had been taken hither, to be exhibited behind the glass partition, on the chance of its being identified. He edged his way through the crowd to the front and stood waiting with the rest.

Presently two men came out bearing a stretcher. One of them went back into the building, while the other opened the door of the conveyance, and Camille saw in it a rigid form, swathed from head to foot in a black cloth. The man stood with his fingers on the door handle waiting for his comrade to return. After a minute he grew impatient, and casting his eyes over those nearest to him, fixed them on Camille.

"You look strong enough," he said, "help me carry that thing inside—I can't stand here all day. Don't be frightened," he continued with a laugh, "he won't hurt you; he will never bite again."

Feeling his courage called into question, Camille stepped forward resolutely, although his soul revolted against the task.

"Now just wait a little," said the man briskly, "and follow my directions."

Then he commenced hauling the cloth-covered object out of the cart till there was enough of it to give Camille a hold.

"It's not so very heavy," commented the man, in a business-like way, "but I don't like doing the job by myself, because the covering might come undone and then—there, you stupid, you have just done what I wished to prevent."

The disgust of touch Camille felt had made him

clumsy, and one end of the pall had flapped back, exposing the face of the corpse. Instinctively he shut his eyes, but the momentary glance he had obtained had given him a weird sense of acquaintanceship with what he had seen—there was a likeness, a something familiar, which, despite his horror, compelled him to look again. And, at that second glance, his eyes grew stiff in his head, his jaw fell, and his arms starned till they clung round their burden convulsively.

The attendant tapped him on the shoulder,

"Here, my good fellow, don't you die too, else people will say I asked one corpse to carry another."

With a sudden jerk, Camille lifted the body out entirely, and strained it to him closely. Where was he to run—where was he to escape from these people who scorched him with their prying glances? Whither was he to take his dear one, his dead one, where he might look at him in solitude, and breathe the life back into the rigid limbs? No, no—his father was not dead—he only shammed being dead before these strangers; once he was alone with his son, he would not—he must not remain dead; it was merely a practical joke the devil had played, and one he dared not keep up too long.

Without a sound from his lips Camille turned to go, carrying the body as if it were a doll's weight.

"Send for the police—he has gone mad," shrieked a woman from among the crowd.

"Softly, not so fast," said the astonished attendant, grasping Camille by the shoulder; "why, this is the coolest thing in body-stealing I have ever heard of—in open daylight, before hundreds of people!"

"Who is stealing?" asked Camille calmly. "This is my own—it belongs to me; surely a man may do with his own what he likes?"

"I won't quarrel with you about personal property of this sort," answered the man grimly; "but these things are done with certain formalities. You must prove your claim."

"But this is my father," persisted Camille.

"Makes no difference; you must prove it first. Come, put the thing on the stretcher, and help me take it in."

The crowd was getting larger; the faces around were stamped with eager curiosity. Camille felt he was choking.

"Never mind the stretcher," he gasped; "show me where to go—no, don't touch my father, you will hurt him."

The man shrugged his shoulders and led the way, and immediately after they came to the vault-like chamber that was their destination.

Camille felt he was alone at last, and that there was no more danger of being robbed of his treasure-trove. Lovingly he placed it on the floor, and crouched beside it on hands and knees.

"Father," he whispered in the cold, dead ear.

"Father," he whispered again, "it is I—your son, Camille."

He pulled back the folds of the shroud altogether, stooping lower and lower, till his face touched the face of the dead. Poor father—he seemed so cold, so cold. Camille opened the coat. What was this? The chest, too, felt so stiff and chill, despite the live heart that should be beating beneath. Good God, would he never become warm, despite the close presence of his son, despite the agonised contact of his life-quivering limbs? The man outside had spoken of him as "the thing"; one spoke like that only of a dead dog—it

was scandalous. Presently his father would open his eyes and rebuke the fellow for his lack of courtesy, only he wanted a little more rubbing and caressing; it was such a long time since he had been caressed by his son.

Suddenly Camille noticed something that showed white against the black background of the covering—a scrap of paper crumpled into a ball; it must have fallen from the nerveless clutch of the dead hand. Eagerly he snatched at it and strained his eyes in the half-light of the room to read what it contained.

“To my son, Camille Clairmont,”—and then came the address at Ricotte’s hut. It was very difficult to decipher, because the writing looked as if someone had been continually jogging the writer by the elbow as he traced it.

“It can’t last many minutes longer,” it went on, “I have come all the way to see you once more, and after all I am disappointed. I feel the end is approaching rapidly—I am dying, my son. One request only: let me be buried like a gentleman, with a headstone to my gra—.”

The writing broke off with a sudden flourish that looked like a shriek of agony. Camille scanned the pencilled scrawl painfully, again and again, till its meaning had filtered into his brain. The words read with a terrible sound; they cried aloud an awful truth. The dumb, tight-drawn mouth seemed to have opened to give them vent, and then had closed for ever.

Camille felt them ringing in his ear—“I am dying! The end is approaching!” So it was true after all? His father was dead indeed; it was no illusion—it was mortally real. With a down-gulped cry of



despair he hurled himself on the prostrate body, took it in his arms and strained it to his bosom. "Father, father," he sobbed, and somehow, as from a great vastness, a thousand voices multiplied the word innumera-ly.

A hand touched him gently on the shoulder.

"I am sorry," said the attendant, not unkindly, "but I can't let you stay here longer. When you have proved your identity with the person named here," he pointed to the slip of paper he had picked up from the floor, "you will be allowed to take the corpse away."

"Take him away?" asked Camille, only half understanding—"where?"

"That is none of my business; unless you arrange for the funeral yourself, he will be buried at the expense of the State."

Then there flashed across Camille's brain the request which closed his father's letter. "Bury me like a gentleman." Great God, that would cost money, and where was it to come from? He had four francs; that was hardly enough—not by a long way, as the attendant told him in answer to his enquiry. Could he borrow it? From whom—from Krantz, who lived on charity? or from Ricotte, the stubborn democrat, who hated pomp and display, who would tell him, no doubt, that the living needed looking after—that the dead might shift anyhow?

With a cold sweat upon him he turned to the man.

"How long will you keep him here?" he asked.

"Till the afternoon; we are crowded for space."

Only a few hours! What was he to do? He wrung his hands and gazed helplessly at the still face. "Bury me like a gentleman—I have lived like a

vagabond ; let me be honoured in death at least," the closed lips seemed saying. And then a strange idea came creeping into his head : the pinched narrow features reminded him of something, of somebody he had seen long ago. Ah, he had it : his uncle, his father's brother. How strongly and strangely death brought out the likeness between the two. He would go to him and entreat him to have mercy on the poor dead brother whom he had not pitied in life ; surely his malice would not reach beyond the grave. \*

"I shall return in two hours," he said hurriedly to the attendant ; "till then, I beg of you, let no one disturb him."

He pressed two francs into the man's hand, and darted out without another look at his father ; he felt himself unworthy of the privilege while his duty was yet unperformed.

The omnibus which he ascended crept on slowly—would it never arrive ? He sat motionless, with both hands pressed to his face, heedless of the curious glances of his fellow-passengers. Fate was indeed cruel to him. Why had that harsh thought about his father come into his head that morning of all other mornings ? He need not conceal it from himself any longer : he had been angry with him—"even the being who loved him most made life hard for him," he had said resentfully. And now the difficulty was over. His father was dead—had died, it seemed, to prove his love more signally than ever.

"Avenue des Peupliers," cried the conductor.

Camille started up and jumped down. The great white house loomed before him ; he remembered it well. The errand on which he had first gone to seek it seemed an ecstasy of joy compared with the

present one. This time, at least, he could be more hopeful of success.

The same servant as then answered his summons.

"Ah, it's you, with your uncle. Monsieur can't be bothered," he said, holding the door ajar.

"Only this once I must see him," pleaded Camille. "Tell him I shall never, never trouble him again."

"They are at breakfast. I must ask if you are to be admitted."

Camille waited outside, while the ground seemed burning under his feet. In a minute or two the door opened again.

"You may come in," was the verdict, and immediately after Camille found himself in the room, the sombre magnificence of which had sometimes haunted him in sleep with a nightmare of gold and velvet. His uncle and cousin regarded him with the steel cold glances which on the former occasion had given him the impression of being poniarded.

"To what are we indebted for this honour?" said the older man.

Camille took a step forward and stood with clasped hands and tear-brimming eyes.

"Uncle, have pity on me—I am an orphan; this morning I found my father dead in the streets."

"That is very sad to be sure," came the answer coldly; "but what has that to do with me?"

"He was your brother . . ."

"Excuse me," interrupted his uncle, "that is an inaccuracy; my brother died years and years ago."

"They were taking him into the Morgue, less than two hours since—he is lying there now. Have mercy on me and him, uncle."

"I tell you it is the wrong man," insisted the other;

"my brother—your father—has been dead and buried, as far as I am concerned, these five and twenty years. But apart from that fact, now that he is dead in real earnest, what can I do for him?"

"His last request to me was to receive a gentleman's burial," answered Camille with trembling voice. He searched his pockets, and then remembered that the piece of paper on which was written all his father had set down for will and testament was in the hands of the official—to be used for evidence in case of necessity.

"By all means," sneered his cousin, "build him a mausoleum, and hold a funeral service in the Madeleine."

"You mistake my meaning," said Camille humbly, "he asked for nothing extravagant—only a grave which he did not owe to strangers, and some simple monument to mark the spot where he is laid to rest."

"Then why have you come to us?" continued the cruel sneer. "We are neither sextons nor stone-masons, and we have no landed property in cemeteries."

"I came to ask your help," Camille said quietly, though he felt his gall creeping into his throat. "I am poor, I have no resources, and these things cost money."

"Poor? And when we offered you money last time you trod our charity under heel. No, we must not expose ourselves again to insult," and the young man's voice cut like a scimitar.

"This time I shall thank you on my knees—you shall have my gratitude while I live. I do not ask it even as a gift; let it be lent only, and I shall work my fingers to the bone to repay you quickly."

The older man cast a questioning look at the younger, and a shiver of hope went through Camille.

"What can you be thinking of, father?" said the son, shaking his head emphatically. "This is absurd—to put our hard-earned money in jeopardy for a mere matter of sentiment? Of course that is all it comes to. Corpse is corpse, and graves are graves, and it does not matter a patch whether you have a pater-noster said over you or not. No, we can do nothing."

"We can do nothing," repeated the older man looking at Camille decisively.

Camille returned his glance with vague uncertain eyes.

"You do not mean that you refuse?" he cried hoarsely. He waited a moment to hear their answer; their silence served him instead.

"You will not help someone who will never need aid again in this world?"

"Now go away quietly—don't let us have any hysterics as last time," said his cousin.

Camille ignored his words, and passionately pointed his finger into space. "He is beyond your help and your hate, but you," and his accusing finger veered round to the two impassive faces that met it stolidly, "you are not yet beyond the reach of God's punishment. One day—and it may be soon—you may cry for help, and your cry will remain unanswered as that of the silent lips that have made me their mouthpiece."

His words rang like an inspired imprecation, and the look that accompanied them was like that of one whose eyes saw beyond human ken. He just noted the disdainful gesture with which his cousin swept away both look and utterance, and then he was out again in the street.

At three o'clock that afternoon all that remained of Eugene Clairmont was laid to rest in a pauper's grave.

## CHAPTER ELEVENTH

## *THE VOICE THAT CRIED UNHEARD*

NEITHER Krantz nor Ricotte learnt of Camille's bereavement. The day of the funeral he had sat on the newly-made grave till, at fall of night, the keeper had turned him out, and he had gone home as on other days at close of work. His face showed no sign of the tumult of his emotions; his grief was his own, his very own, and he kept it jealously locked up in the strong-box of his heart where it might never escape into daylight and be shared by others. And so his friends never got an inkling of what had happened.

"Have you arranged with your father?" asked Krantz two or three days after.

"Yes," replied Camille indifferently, "he is provided for."

"What?" was the astonished question. "Has he come into property?"

"Yes—he has a small estate of his own now."

"And you? Can't he give you a start at last?"

"Oh, its only just enough for him," and Camille went on with his bread and butter, while Krantz, for his pains, felt himself saddled with a puzzle. Vainly he waited for an opportunity to continue the subject, but his father's name never again passed Camille's lips.

It was a week before his feelings had regained sufficient stability to allow of his visiting the Ricottes.

He found Fifine alone.

"Where have you been again, truant?" was the answer she vouchsafed to his greeting.

"At home."

"What were you doing?"

"Learning how to 'do without.'"

"Ah!" she exclaimed with a flash of recollection; "and how are you getting on?"

"I am learning; something came the other day and made the lesson easier."

"Did I not tell you?" she cried triumphantly. "That's always the way when you are by yourself. So you did not want my help after all."

"Not to learn, but I may want it to remember. You see, sooner or later I may fall back into the old mood of discontent, and then I should want you to keep me up to the mark."

"And if I did not?"

"Then I should become more discontented than ever." Fifine shook her head vigorously.

"I am afraid you haven't got hold of it properly," she ruled; "you should make up your mind that there is not a thing in the world you could not do without—even my help. That's how I myself feel."

"Could you do without your—father?" the word staggered from his lips. Fifine looked perplexed. "That's different," she said at last. "I have had him all the time; I did not have to worry about getting him, as you do—I mean, did—about the things you hadn't got."

"And Krantz?"

"Oh, he's something like father; he was there to begin with."

"And—and me?" He was almost frightened at the anxiety he discovered in the tone of the question.

"You?" She drawled the word. "I can't say; when you are here, I feel that you ought to be here; but when you are not—"

"When I am not?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Are you in pain?" she said quickly.

"No," he answered, passing his hand across his face to rub out the pucker which he knew had provoked her query.

Then he sat silent. Fifine looked at him curiously and then burst into a laugh.

"What a strange fellow you are," she rippled; "you always look as solemn as if you had just come from a funeral. I don't understand it; I could laugh all day long, and all night too, only I am too sleepy. And then you have such a funny way of talking—you never talk to me as other people do. Why don't you tell me about the sights you see in the streets—the processions, things of that sort?"

"You forget I am at work all day," he said shortly.

"But in the evenings," she persisted; "you never say what happens on the boulevards, the quarrels in the cafés, the songs they sing in the cabarets—that's what Krantz does. Oh, he knows how to amuse one."

"And I—I bore you. Good night." He got up trembling with vexation.

"You great stupid," she laughed, running after and catching him by the sleeve, "I didn't mean that. I suppose you want to pick a quarrel so that you can tell father I offended you. He loves me, but all the same he can scold me very hard."

Camille looked at her reproachfully.

"Do you think I want to cause you annoyance?" he said gently, holding her in turn by the smooth



soft wrist. "Why, that would hurt me more than if it happened to myself."

"Then why are you angry? I don't like anyone to be angry with me."

Camille bit his lip. How could he make himself intelligible to this child, without betraying himself and frightening her? Could he say to her: 'You are now the dearest thing to me in all the world, and it cuts me to the core to hear you bestowing praise on another man'? That he was not as indispensable to her as she to him, that was of course in the nature of things. His love was already full-grown, and had put forth strong grasping tentacles that twined round and made her part and parcel of himself. Hers were the feelings of childhood that reach backwards to old associations, nor easily spread afield to fasten themselves to things of alien growth.

"Will you do me a favour, Fifine?" he asked.

"If I can," was the ready answer.

"I want you to think of me more often—to think that you could not 'do without' me."

She looked at him, her eyes large with wonder.

"What a funny favour," she blurted out at length, "I thought you wanted me to put a patch on your coat, or something of that kind."

"But you will try?" he said earnestly.

"I don't see what good it would do you; what difference can it make?"

"A good deal—it would make me happier; I should smile more often."

"Make—you—happier—because I thought of you?" she said slowly, as though passing the words in review. "I don't understand it."

"Not now, perhaps, but you will later on. Still, you can do it without understanding."

"That's foolish—to do a thing without knowing why. Can't you wait till I find out the reason?"

"The sooner you begin, the sooner you will find out the reason. Promise you will try, Fifine."

"I will try if you really want me to—but," she shook her head. "Ah, there is father."

Ricotte's step was heard outside, and she ran to the door, and Camille thought bitterly that she welcomed the diversion.

Ricotte entered, looking red and choleric.

"You here?" he said, holding out his hand to Camille.

"Yes," said the latter, forcing a smile, "talking over very serious matters with Fifine—were we not, Fifine?"

"Then I hope you came to a more satisfactory conclusion than I did," growled Ricotte. "Get me my supper, little one."

"What has happened?" asked Camille, as was expected of him.

"Some people can never see anything in the proper light," went on the growling. "Give them argument on argument; it's like throwing good things on a dung heap—the old dung remains at the bottom. Here I have been talking for two hours with Bourgonne, the publican across the road; he pretends to be a democrat. I maintained that the privileged classes should be hated; he says they should be treated with contempt. I prove to him, point by point, that hatred is the only appropriate attitude under the circumstances; he sticks to his opinion that they should be despised for a set of selfish pampered lap dogs, to be kicked out of the way when no one is looking. That's quite wrong; whatever you do, do openly. Hate them tooth and nail, I say, and let

them know it. You have some common-sense, Camille, what do you think?"

"If anything of the two things, I believe Bourgogne is more correct."

"What's that?" broke angrily from Ricotte.

"Let me explain. In hating a man you pay him a compliment; he takes it as an acknowledgment of his strength. You never hate a thing that is weaker and feebler than yourself for doing you an injury; as a rule you despise it—treat it with scorn."

Ricotte scratched his head. "There's something in that, he admitted at last; "but Bourgogne did not put it that way."

"However, as a matter of fact," continued Camille with a strange gleam in his eyes, "I think you are both wrong; I could suggest a better alternative."

"Which is?"

"To ignore them." Camille's tone was full of bitterness. "Ignore them, I say. Leave them to themselves. Let them revel and riot in their own God-forsaken fashion. Let them sicken and die of their vices, let them be poisoned by their joys. So long as we keep clear of the contamination, it can make no difference to us."

Ricotte looked at him in astonishment. This was a new voice, one which he had never heard before—a voice that sounded strong and true; and so he kept silence to hear it speak again.

"Have we workers not a world of our own?" continued Camille, stung to speech by the poignancy of his wrong; "a world that is more beautiful than theirs, although we have no gold to gild it and make it resplendent? But we adorn it with our charity, our fellow-feeling; we keep it clear of tinsel and veneer,

we sweep out of its corners all humbug and hypocrisy, and then we can look into each others' faces without casting our eyes down."

"Bravo!" cried Ricotte, "where did you get all that from, youngster?"

"I learnt it, as one learns so many other things."

"I thought your ideas were different when you first came here."

"Different in as much as they did not exist. I had certain illusions. You know one grows them easily out in the country where will-o'-the-wisps abound. Away in our little village, when it came on night and everything was dark and hushed, one could dream at ease, with nothing to interrupt you but the song of birds when the sun rose. But in the great cities of the world, where night is turned into day, where there is not a moment's lull, scarcely does one drift into dreamland when through the crevices of your chamber come the roar and turmoil, and drag you back into reality. When I first saw the glare of your great street lamps, I thought they blazed so proudly because they had nothing to conceal. But I have learnt since that men light them because they are too shameless for concealment, and because they glory in their shamelessness."

Ricotte nodded approvingly.

"I knew you would find it out—but you might have done so sooner," he said.

"I don't regret the delay," replied Camille; "slow learning means slow forgetting. I tell you, I shall be slow to forget, because I am sure now."

"Sure of what?"

"That justice, humanity, philanthropy are catch-words that pass as current coin in public, and are

reckoned as counterfeit in home use. They are on everybody's lips, and in nobody's heart. One of these days, perhaps, they will become terms of reproach."

A sudden thought struck Ricotte that made him look closely at Camille.

"You talk as if you had some grievance," he said.

"None at all," protested Camille quickly, half afraid that his feelings had carried him too far. "I speak from observation; surely you do the same."

"I only generalised—your words have a personal ring."

"You mistake me; I only go a little more into detail," said Camille, trying hard to appear indifferent. He knew very well on what text he preached his sermon, but for the moment he had forgotten that he was preaching it to others, not to himself. "If I got warm over the subject, Ricotte, it was merely to show you that my notions are not a mere whim of my fancy—they grow deep in my heart."

"I believe you, my boy," said Ricotte cordially. "What good would it do you to sham to me? All you mean is, that you are in sympathy with another man—as honest and as poor as yourself—on a question which he has made the greatest factor in his life. There's not much to be gained from that."

"As if I wanted to gain anything by it," said Camille lightly; and then he felt, with a pang, that the words resounded in his heart with an echo of falsehood. For just then Fifine re-entered, carrying the humble meal she had prepared for her father, and as he looked at her he could not conceal from himself that his sympathy with Ricotte's views could not but bring her nearer to him. And then he reflected again, and thought he could still feel justified in his

own eyes, and count himself honest. He was not shamming: Fifine or no Fifine, those would have been his sentiments. God knew, he had motive enough of his own.

"Why, Ricotte," he said, "I don't know whether to laugh at myself, or to cry 'peccavi.' True enough, I came to Paris with the absurd intention of becoming a rich man, and now I feel as if my better genius turned me from a great crime. That is my gain perhaps."

"And mine too," said Ricotte earnestly.

"How yours?"

"For the simple reason that it preserved for my cause a man worth having. I believe, Camille, if you intended persevering, you would attain your object."

"That is a thing to be safeguarded against. Here is my hand, Ricotte; it means a promise that I shall not persevere. I belong to your cause—our cause, body and soul. Fifine shall be witness to that."

"Why, what is it you promise?" she asked. After all she was but a child, and her understanding not tall enough to reach up to all these things.

"To be yours always and always," struggled on Camille's lips, and it cost him an effort to hold the words back.

"To be never anything but what I am," he said aloud; that would serve both purposes. And then in answer to her still questioning look, he continued:

"A working man, by the grace of God."

"I understand," she nodded; "you mean to earn your own living, and not to make others earn it for you—and to ask for nothing more."

"Except one thing." Again he had to swallow the words,

"Nothing more," he assented in confusion.

"I witness to that," she said almost solemnly, and Camille thought it was the recording angel in heaven that had testified to his undertaking.

"All right, my boy," said Ricotte gleefully, "you will soon have your work cut out for you. The 'Egalité' Club meets in three weeks. I shall be proud to introduce the new member."

When Camille came home he found Krantz there—in bed, but awake—and was glad of it. He wanted Krantz that evening.

"Just come from the Ricottes'," he explained, taking off his coat, and seating himself on the edge of the pallet.

"There are worse places you might have come from," said Krantz.

"Quite true. It's another thing I have to thank you for. Without you I should not have known them."

"Without me you would have known others as good. So take your thanks back."

"There might be a particular reason to make me grateful," said Camille. He thought of the pauper's grave out in the dark, and shuddered to think how empty the world would now have seemed but for a certain presence.

"Yes, Ricotte is an intelligent fellow," said Krantz, making a random guess at his meaning—"stimulates one's ideas. There's enough vitality about him to electrify a whole hospital of paralytics."

Camille made no immediate answer. Why was Krantz so thick-headed? Nervously he ran his fingers through his hair.

"Fifine is growing into a woman," he stammered at

last. Krantz sat up suddenly as if the intelligence contained something astounding.

"Yes—it's a way little girls have—unfortunately for them," he said, settling back and pretending to look unconscious of having moved. It was unnecessary. Camille was deep in his own thoughts.

"She will make a good woman," he resumed vaguely.

"Her mother was a good woman; that sort of thing sticks in the blood."

There was an irritation in Krantz's voice that would have made Camille wonder had he noticed it.

"It's absurd to think of it yet, but the man who gets her will be a lucky fellow," said Camille, holding Krantz's remark beside the question.

"Perhaps," said the latter curtly.

"I have been thinking a good deal of her lately," proceeded Camille.

"Have you? A great compliment to her, I am sure."

"Don't jest, Krantz. I am in earnest—how much in earnest I hardly dare to admit."

"To her or to me?"

"To myself. I believe I should get frightened."

"Why frightened?" asked Krantz with wrinkled brows.

"Is there not something terrible in the thought of having placed your chance of happiness outside yourself and entrusted it to others?" cried Camille passionately. "Others may not treat it as—as tenderly as one does oneself."

"Has it come to that?"

Camille looked at the questioner.

"You are in love with her—own to it!" went on Krantz almost fiercely.



Camille hung his head and was silent. He had thought it would be quite easy to make the avowal; he had expected that Krantz would listen patiently and look sympathetic. Instead of that he had a feeling of being asked to admit some misdeed, which made him reluctant in his answer.

"And she?" Krantz asked again.

"She is a child—she does not understand."

A change came over Krantz.

"Well, by the virtues of the saints in heaven and by the sins of hell," he laughed boisterously, "it must be a rare joke to see a hulking fellow like you dangle after a chit in petticoats."

"I told you once that this is no joke to me," said Camille quietly. Krantz jarred on him; his laugh seemed to come in at the wrong place.

"There, don't take it ill. The whole thing is a surprise to me. I never thought of it. And you say there is no arrangement between you two—no promise to wait till she is older—something of that sort?"

"Nothing;" there was much sadness in the word. "I shall wait, promise or no promise, and take my chance when it comes."

"The wisest thing you can do, my boy; and if you will take my advice you will keep yourself a little scarce in that quarter—for the present at least."

"I could not, Krantz. I have done it so far because I had still a doubt as to my feelings. I am only too sure now. I can't keep away."

"Just as you like, then," said Krantz with a yawn, and turning his face wall-ward, to shew he was tired of the discussion.

Five minutes passed in silence.

"Krantz," called Camille softly.

"Well?"

"Of course you need not mention what I have told you to—to anyone."

"Certainly not," replied Krantz in a tone that somehow belied the show of sleepiness he had just made. "By the way, Camille, how old are you?"

"Turned twenty-one—why?"

"Oh, nothing—I was just thinking of the difference of age, and—and what town were you born in—Nantes wasn't it?"

"No, Nemours—what makes you ask?"

"I was wondering, that's all. Good night."

A few days later Camille returned to the hut early in the afternoon. For some reason or other Pitoignac had dismissed the labourers long before their usual time, and Camille was pleased because he would be able to see Fifine so much sooner that evening. He expected to find Krantz inside taking his siesta, but instead of him he saw an official-looking envelope, addressed to himself, staring him in the face from the table. In great wonder he took it up, looked at the seal on the back, and turned pale. So it had come at last! Quickly he extracted the enclosure—it was his conscription-summons. With swimming eyes he read it through: he was ordered to be at the place of parade that day three weeks. There was no mistaking it—there it stood black on white:

"Camille Clairmont, born 30th September, 18—, at Nemours."

He sat down and buried his face in his hands. God could witness—it was not cowardice; he did not shirk doing his duty to his country. A year ago he would have gone gladly if there had not been his father to work for. But now chains, forged out of his

heart-strings, seemed holding him back, and if he broke away from them his heart might bleed to death with the rupture. Just when he had learnt the value of the prize he had set his soul on, he was to be removed where he would be debarred from seeing it with his eyes, much less, touching it with his hands. If they had only given him more time, a few months, a few weeks to prepare for it. Years and years of separation! They would send him away, thousands of miles away, where there was no Fifine, where the world would be void with a great emptiness. Time enough for her to forget him; time enough for him to eat his heart out in impotent longing.

A sudden thought shot through him: after all, it was strange—how was it the summons reached him? Who knew of him? How was it they found him in this myriad congregation of men from every cranny of the globe? But after a while he gave up wondering. No doubt the authorities had means and instruments of which he could form no conjecture; they had found him as, no doubt, they had found a thousand others. Why trouble about it! The fact remained—that could not be troubled away.

With a sigh that was half a groan he rose and sallied out. He must have air; the hut was squeezing him to death between its four walls. So he stepped out; his feet devoured the ground ravenously—they could not get enough of it. The day was a golden autumn glory. Far away before him it stretched, consummating itself at the apex of the horizon in a flaming aureole. His eyes fastened upon it, and he paced on, faster and faster, because it seemed that if he only walked fast and far enough, he would come up to the golden glory, to the gleaming aureole, so that

his hands could seize it and lay it on his heart in great patches of light to obliterate the dark shadows of pain that crouched there. Faster, faster, for the gold was getting paler, the effulgence less radiant, and unless he reached it soon it might fade away entirely. And then it would be night, night within and without.

He had arrived at the upper reaches of the river where it was escaping the clutch of the city, where it was scenting the freedom of the open plains, and therefore hurried on twinkling so joyously. Camille stopped and looked round with a long breath. The world was beautiful, but its beauty was not for him. He threw himself down on the sward and gazed dreamily into the leaping wavelets that looked like the babies of the water-elves. And again he glanced up at the fire-sheaves overhead that resembled a flaming harvest of wrath. Full of contrasts was the world, and that was what made it so eternal and infinite, and immortalised it by the magic of its changes. If one could only lie there and contemplate—if things were made to reach only as far as the eyes and not to the heart! True, there would be no joy, but likewise there would be no sorrow. There would be everlasting peace, a breathless silence unfraught with the conflicts between soul and sense, man would be a god . . .

What was that? Camille leapt up; he had heard a cry that plainly had the fear of death in it.

"Help!" rang again in his ears.

He looked hard into the gathering twilight, and there he saw drifting the little skiff which the reckless rower had rammed against the floating buoy, and there was the rower himself, struggling with the waters.

Quick as thought Camille dashed off his coat, ran forward to the brink, lifted his arms for the plunge,

and stopped rooted to the ground. A straggling ray had flashed across the face in the water, lighting it up vividly, luridly, and in the flash Camille had recognised it. It was his cousin's.

"Help, help," came the agonised voice.

What, help him—save him, who had spurned, mocked, derided him—had made a brute of him? Brute then let him be, brutes cannot feel—cannot save. No, let it die, the vermin—the earth would be cleaner, wholesomer for its death! And then something said: It is a human soul like yours—it is expiating its sins, the greedy grasp of death will retain but the iniquities of it, and it shall survive to be pure—save it!

Camille put his hands to his ears: one more prompting, and he must plunge in. Ah, he had it: Save life—it was true; but not to endanger life, was equally true. How did he know he could save him, how was he sure that he had not lost the skill of his arms, how—? And then the answer to the miserable quibble flashed upon him: Pitoignac! One by one, with lightning speed the events of the quarry passed through his brain: the provocation, the conspiracy, the death trap, the remorse, the rescue . . .

"Help!" he heard it dimly above the surging in his head. No, that was no excuse—if he could rescue one man who had lost all claim to mercy, why not another? But then the last picture of all rose before him: the piteous, shrunken corpse at the Morgue, his abject appeal, the maddening heartlessness of the thing over there in the water, the pauper's grave . . .

And now he felt strong again: let him cry for help—he was crying to ears of adamant. Pitilessly Camille watched the desperate struggle, pitilessly he listened

to the cries growing fainter, until there was no more struggling, no more crying—the surface of the river showed empty and placid, but in the middle of it seemed to be a great staring hole, a deep swirling vortex that would not close up, and from it Camille seemed to see protruding two twitching, convulsive arms that grew longer and longer, till they reached him and caught him by the throat, choking the light from his eyes, the life from his soul.

He reeled, clutching the air with short, contorted grasps, and the darkness closed in around him.\*

## CHAPTER TWELFTH

## *MONTE CRISTO MALGRÉ LUI*

THE autumn passed ; another, and yet another had come and gone, and it was not till one day during the fourth that Camille again felt Paris pavement under his feet. The streets, the people, had the same look he remembered of old, and unspeakably glad he was to be amongst them once more. Bronzed and upright, he appeared what he was—the soldier home from foreign service.

“Here it is—number 23, first *étage*,” he said to himself, referring to the written address in his hand. He mounted ; yes he was right—the door-plate said :

“Arnaut Lavoisier, Lawyer.”

“Tell your master, Camille Clairmont is here to see him,” he told the servant who answered his summons.

Camille had only to wait a second or two when the lawyer himself bustled out.

“Pray, come in, Monsieur Clairmont,” he cried, shaking Camille by the hand effusively, and bowing and scraping his way back into the room.

Camille felt surprised. ‘Monsieur’ Clairmont? No one had ever styled him ‘Monsieur’ since he was born.

“I received instructions from headquarters to call on you as soon as I reached Paris. Have you something to say to me? Perhaps it is in your power to furnish me with employment,” he said diffidently.

"Furnish you with employment?" repeated the lawyer urbanely. "Perhaps, my dear Monsieur Clairmont, it will be your pleasure to furnish me with employment."

A vague thrill of fear shot through Camille. What did this sarcasm on the part of the lawyer mean? Had he been guilty of some misdemeanour to which he had become amenable on his return to the state of civilian, in which M. Lavoisier was to act as his counsel? How vexatious! He wanted to be free and unencumbered. At last he was back in Paris after his three years of military exile under the burning skies of Tunis, and he had something else to do here than waste his time in legal entanglements.

The lawyer saw the troubled look on his face, and thought it advisable to cut matters short.

"You don't know, then, why you have received remission of further service, and for what purpose you have been ordered to call on me?" he asked.

Camille shook his head.

"Well then," and the lawyer's face beamed, "it will be my pleasant duty to be the first to congratulate you on your good fortune: you have been appointed sole heir to the late M. Arsène Clairmont, your uncle."

He stepped back to measure the effect of his words.

"Is that what you had to tell me?" asked Camille quietly.

"Certainly," said the lawyer, his exuberance contracting at the icy attitude of the other. He had expected to be embraced and to be kissed on both cheeks at least.

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing else?" shouted the lawyer, carried out of himself, "what else did you expect unless it was to be made Emperor?"



"Then I wish you good day," said Camille as nonchalantly as before, preparing to take his departure.

With a great effort the lawyer bounded forward, turned the key in the door, and stood with his back to it.

"But, M. Clairmont," he panted breathlessly, "I can't allow you to go like this; you must put your mind to this business. You must go through the necessary formalities, you must attend to the thousand and one details connected with the making over of the estates. Surely you don't expect me to run after you through the streets of Paris, dragging your uncle's millions . . ."

"I will have nothing to do with my uncle's millions," said Camille firmly.

The lawyer bent forward and looked anxiously into his face.

"I follow your thoughts," said Camille smilingly; "but reassure yourself, M. Lavoisier, I am quite sane."

"Then to what am I to attribute this unheard of eccentricity?" asked the lawyer helplessly. And then with a sudden thought he continued: "Of course, you are Camille Clairmont?"

"There can be hardly any doubt as to my identity—here are my papers of discharge, compare them."

"Yes, yes, that is all in order," said the lawyer hastily. "The mere fact of your calling is sufficient guarantee. When I applied three months ago to the Minister of War, stating the exceptional circumstances which justified me in asking for your discharge, I was informed that your first three years of service were nearly at an end, and that matters must be left to stand over till then; in the meantime, however, my communication would be strictly confidential. Still,

that does not account for your quixotic behaviour, as I must insist on terming it. Pray take a seat and let us talk reason."

Camille followed him reluctantly, and seated himself on the wooden office chair instead of the proffered *fauteuil*. The two men looked at each other in silence for a time.

Camille spoke first. "I assure you, my dear sir, my strange behaviour, as from your point of view you are right in calling it, is no mere whim or coquetry. I know I am entitled to my uncle's wealth if his will makes me his heir. But I have certain opinions of my own. I wish to earn my living by honest labour, and if you can put me in the way of it, I shall be greatly indebted to you. Candidly speaking, I have had no obligation to my uncle in his lifetime, and I do not care to have any now that he is dead."

The lawyer nodded sapiently.

"Yes, I know," he answered; "your uncle has used you very hardly—he confessed as much to me in his last days. And if it will cause you any satisfaction, he came to look upon his subsequent calamity as the just retribution of God for his implacable conduct to you. You are perhaps not aware that shortly after the date of your last visit to him, his only son was drowned accidentally."

Camille blanched and held his breath, lest it should form itself into syllables and betray his secret.

"It was in consequence of this," continued the lawyer, "that a lingering disease seized on him, which ended by carrying him off three months ago. The least atonement he could make you was to consign

to you his wealth, and on his death-bed he urged me to leave no stone unturned to discover your whereabouts. In fact, I wrote to the Minister at his suggestion that, judging from your age, you were probably performing your term of service. That you would for one moment hesitate about accepting the inheritance was a contingency that never struck him."

"No," said Camille bitterly; "he never thought I should have the bottomless impertinence to refuse, as little as he thought that when I implored his help I really needed it. Your men of money have little tact. They refuse aid when it comes as a favour, and grant it when it is nothing but an insult."

"True," replied the lawyer dryly, "and therefore by joining the guild you might set them a wholesome example in the proper economy of people's feelings."

"I have already told you, M. Lavoisier, I shall not accept the money. Let it pass to the State if there is no alternative heir. My uncle's wealth, though it were ten times as great, will not indemnify me for what I have suffered at his hands. I have no fear concerning my future. I have two strong arms and a moderate head-piece, and, moreover, I am young."

He rose to go. The lawyer rose too, looking flurried and desperate.

"But, M. Clairmont," he stammered, twining his fingers, "in the name of Heaven, you will not carry your resentment to this absurd pitch? Have you considered what you are doing?"

"M. Lavoisier, you are very obstinate. Do you want to be convinced? Give me a sheet of paper and you can witness legally to my renunciation."

"Very well then," said the lawyer after a moment's deep consideration; "but it would be more formal if you made it on the proper spot."

"Where is that?"

"In your uncle's—that is, in your house, Avenue des Peupliers," explained the lawyer, keeping a straight face on his fiction.

"Very good, if you wish it," replied Camille, resignedly; "but do not detain me longer than you can help."

"Not a moment," bustled the lawyer, getting into his overcoat. "Come, M. Clairmont; we shall take a fiacre—at my expense, of course."

Camille's blood tingled as they whirled on; it was a fine sensation, riding in a fiacre. Of course he had travelled in trains; but then he was only traversing inanimate landscapes, past fast-rooted forests, slow-flowing rivers, idly ruminating quadrupeds, waddling, slouch-gaited labourers of the fields. But here he was rushing through a panorama of life, full of movement and action—and he was proceeding much faster than so many others. Yes, it was a pleasant thing to progress faster than the rest. He understood now why people who could afford fiacres arrived at their goal of locality, as well as of life, so much easier and sooner than those who walked on foot. Well, if he wanted, he could ride in fiacres every day of the year, and yet he was even now on his way to deprive himself of the possibility.

He laughed to himself like a schoolboy who has successfully achieved a practical joke; he had completely mystified the worthy man at his side, yet, to himself, everything was so clear and transparent;

he knew so well the why and the wherefore of his doing, the motive and the object, and he could sum it all up in one word—one name that had trembled on his lips every hour of the day for the last three years, a name which, to this cold man of business, would be an empty sound, and which, for him, had filled the whole world with music. The first thought, the only thought, that had struck him when he had been told the astounding news that morning, had been: "Now I can go to Ricotte—can say boldly—'Look what I am giving up for your—for our—cause. My sacrifice deserves some recompense. I ask it at your hands—give me your daughter; I shall go back to the regiment, serve the remainder of my time, and then come back to claim her.'"

That was what he intended doing, and now, face to face with his intention, a thought came to him that made him quail: go to Ricotte—that was easily said—but where was Ricotte, and Fifine, and Krantz? The letters he had written them during the first few months of his service had remained unanswered, and after that they had come back to him unopened. He had written to Krantz at the out-house—not a word from him either. And that was why he was now so keen-set on getting this business over, because he wanted to scour the town, to search it nook and cranny, till he had found them all, and could live at her side for one day, for a single hour only, before he must return into exile.

The fiacre stopped with a jerk that threw Camille back into the immediate present.

The lawyer stepped out. Camille followed him slowly and thoughtfully up the stone staircase. He was mounting it as its owner—he would descend it

a casual visitor. He felt exultant. To him, poor insignificant outcast, had come what comes but to few men in a life of high station—to dispose of providence, to fashion his fate in accordance with his will and desire. For the time being, he was a demi-god, and the supremeness of that moment would tingle and quiver through his soul ever after with rebounding thrills of memory, and be as a tonic to him, when the burdens of the humble lot, which he was about to choose for his own, would slacken the sinews of his endurance.

The house lay quiet; the shuttered windows seemed to be its eyelids closed in sleep. The lawyer rang discreetly, as though he were afraid of causing a panic among the slumbering echoes inside. The door was opened in the same tip-toe manner by the porter. In the hall the desolation was still more patent.

"Dreary work, this watching — eh, Baptiste?" asked M. Lavoisier.

"I have felt livelier, sir," answered the man, and then he held his breath, for his eyes had fallen on the lawyer's companion. He knew the face—it belonged to the young fellow who came and said M. Clairmont was his uncle. Baptiste knew a nephew was the heir. The sweat started on his forehead; could this be he—this lad, whom he had once taken to be an applicant for the honourable post of stable-boy?

"Just make light in the house, Baptiste, while we wait in the study," said the lawyer, and Baptiste hurried off, glad of a chance to hide his consternation.

"Let us go up, M. Clairmont," continued the

lawyer. And for the third time in his life Camille walked up the gleaming escalier, covered with the melting soft carpets that had made him feel he was walking on clouds, and for the third time he was standing in the gold and velvet chamber which he recollected so well and so bitterly. There stood the same folding-screen, and every moment he thought it would be pushed aside and reveal the two cold faces with the steel-glittering eyes — one of them he had seen afterwards, not once, but a hundred, a thousand times, especially in his sleep—and God knew how many more times he was destined to behold it. . . .

"Sit down, M. Clairmont; a comfortable room, eh? Ah, your uncle had taste, although this is only a mediocre specimen of it. It was more a business-room, where the two of them—you know that was the whole extent of the family circle—used to breakfast and map out plans for their enterprises before they took them to the counting-house. But you shall see—you shall see; and though you may think of your uncle as a man of little heart, you will at least, when you go away from here, do him the justice of giving him credit for much artistic feeling."

There was a knock, and Baptiste appeared in the doorway.

"All is ready," he announced, coughing respectfully.

"Then let us proceed, M. Clairmont," said the lawyer; "pray follow me."

"Will not all this take a considerable time?" asked Camille, chafing with impatience.

"Be sure I shall not detain you a moment longer than is absolutely necessary," was the smooth reply.

"But you could set up the document in five minutes for me to sign, and be done with it."

Lavoisier avoided Camille's look.

"I am sorry I can't do that," he said glibly. "Before I draw up the statement, we must make some sort of an inventory of the property. Baptiste has, no doubt, been a faithful watcher. He was in your uncle's service for twenty years; but still we must have a formal assurance that everything is untouched. It will not occupy you long; you will have plenty of time to regret your decision afterwards."

Camille shrugged his shoulders. The man would not prate of regret if he knew what Camille would gain by losing this.

They stepped out into the corridor. "Let us take the dining-room first," said Lavoisier. He threw open the massive oak door, and Camille quickly flung his hands up, because a hundred daggers seemed to have stabbed him in the eyes; but when he had regained composure enough to look again, he saw it was merely the sharp-cut glint of the carafes and metal-mounted flasks, and the quick-darting sheen of cutlery that gleamed and glittered like this in the blaze of the autumn sun.

"We shall just stroll round," said Lavoisier, taking him by the arm. Mechanically Camille followed; there was something magnetic about this splendour that drew him to look upon it at closer range.

"We shall now investigate the *Salon*; this way, M. Clairmont."

Baptiste had already pulled aside the heavy



damask *portiere*, and had flung back the folding doors. Camille stood bewildered, his head in a whirl, his eyes giddy—surely he must be in Paradise; such riches could not exist on earth. The lawyer watched him furtively, with much trepidation of heart. Was his plan working?

"I told you so; your uncle had a beautiful taste," he said, with affected indifference. "Next comes the reception-chamber."

Higher and higher rose Camille's amazement. He felt crushed, he seemed so infinitely small among these immeasurable glories. But more than that—he was getting afraid. There was something siren-like in all this, some vaguely lascivious allure-ment that enticed him from himself and all he had known himself to feel.

"Princes and ambassadors have stood in this room; does it not look like it?" said Lavoisier, with suppressed triumph in his voice. "Let us go on to the picture-gallery."

Without a word of resistance Camille followed him. What he saw there he could not understand, but he knew there must be something divine in the creations that lined the walls, for involuntarily he bowed his head just as though he were entering a place of worship. His soul had become a pair of lungs with which he quaffed the beautiful in long, deep breaths.

"And now to the library," came Lavoisier's voice, in very matter-of-fact tone.

Camille gave a loud gasp when they entered the huge apartment. Rows and rows of books, in mahogany cases latticed with gilt wire, stretched

endlessly, ranged in due sequence and order—all the wealth which the most richly dowered minds had left for the inheritance of the world. Ah! this was a different thing to Madame Fluquette's tawdry, dog-eared volumes, corroded by the river's mists, shrunk by the winter blasts, shrivelled by the summer's heat! And they were all his own—he might read them, touch them, fondle them from morning till night, and no snarling voice would cry from the pentagonal booth:

"There you are, you lazy scamp, neglecting the customers again!"

Oh, if things were only otherwise! If Ricotte . . .

"We must delay here a few moments, M. Clairmont, before we pass on to the stables," said the lawyer. He pulled out his bunch of keys and selected one. Then he went up to the iron safe that stood ensconced in the niche next to the fireplace, unlocked it with much ceremony, and took from it a bundle of papers.

"If you will kindly favour me with your attention," he said to Camille, pushing up two chairs to the reading-table. "These are certain documents relating to your late uncle's properties in various parts of the country. This one is a title-deed for game preserves near the Ardennes. This, again, is the assignment for a park and summer residence in the South. Here, again, we have a bill of purchase of a fishing-weir in . . ."

Camille jumped up, and fixed the speaker with an angry glance,

"I can see it all now, M. Lavoisier; I see through your plan," he cried. "You have brought me here

to dazzle my eyes with my uncle's treasures and to make me blind to my resolution—in fact, you have deceived me all through."

"Why should I deny it?" answered the lawyer blandly. "Yes, that was my intention—forgive the little ruse. Considering—I trust I am giving you no offence—considering your lowly circumstances of life hitherto, I was under the impression that you could have no clear conception of the meaning of wealth, and consequently needed the aid of ocular demonstration. I hope that now, with a fuller idea of what you intend renouncing, you will not insist on being so—so—excuse me—foolhardy."

Camille made no answer. He was thinking. The lawyer's underhand action awakened in him a vague recollection of its having a precedent of something analogous, and yet of a totally different nature, when he was duped for what people considered to be his good. Ah, he had it! After his first visit to this great mansion, when he left it, his heart seething with bitterness and despair, Krantz had taken him to the Morgue. Then, too, he had read the deceiver's purpose, and its moral, which was: "True, you are badly off, but look at these poor wretches who must have been very much worse off, since this was their last resource."

That time he had been shown over the treasure-house of death, the garner in which misery deposited its harvest. But now there lay spread out before him, ready for his grasp, all the enticements of life, all the blandishments of human joy; yet between him and them stood a fairy-like creature, a thing all light and gossamer, from whose mouth sounded

strong and loud certain words that had ever since seemed the mandate and bidding of his destiny—just four words :

“I witness to that !”

It was hard, very hard, but suddenly a ray of hope shot through him. Three years had passed since then. What could not happen in three years? Minds change—moods change—men change. Perhaps Ricotte had softened in his convictions, perhaps his heart had become wider, more tolerant in its sympathies—or perhaps it could be made so. There could be no harm in the attempt. Human nature could well take up the tussle against preconceived notions, and surely Ricotte had not hated away all his share of human nature. At any rate, till the attempt had been made, and had failed, he need not do anything irretrievable.

The lawyer saw the wavering of Camille's soul depicted on his face. Now was his time—a skilful push, and his lesson would be driven home.

“Yes, M. Clairmont,” he said deferentially ; “I respect your motives, such as they are ; but occasionally people put their motives in their pockets, especially if these are tolerably empty ones—no offence, my dear M. Clairmont. Above all, I pray you to disabuse your mind of any suspicion of self-interest on my part.”

“I never thought of it,” said Camille ; “I was thinking instead that sometimes a man's motives are too big for his pockets, however empty these may be.”

“Yours should' not be. If they are, I feel pretty certain time will make them shrink.”

"That is my opinion; and therefore I say, give me time—a week, a month, a year. Let us defer the matter so long. You shall hear from me in any case."

The reply fitted, though it was at cross-purposes with the lawyer's meaning.

"Very good," said M. Lavoisier, rubbing his hands gleefully; "and in the meantime, M. Clairmont, can I—no offence, I beg you—can I be of service to you?" He took out his cheque-book with an interrogative gesture.

"No," replied Camille, almost gruffly; "I shall not touch a sou till I know whether it is mine or not."

"But it is yours—all yours!" cried the lawyer in exasperation.

"That means starting the whole controversy over again, and I have no time for that. I have given you my provisional answer. You must stand by that. Good-morning."

He took up his cap and went out, Lavoisier following him as far as the door in speechless amazement.

"He ~~must~~<sup>must</sup> be a lunatic after all," said the worthy man to himself. "I must write up to the regiment and ask whether he ever suffered from fever or sunstroke. Dear me, I feel quite ill with the excitement."

Without bestowing a thought on the lawyer's sensations, and very much preoccupied with his own, Camille hurried off upon his quest. With the soldier's sense of discipline strong upon him, he had, in accordance with his instructions, made M.

Lavoisier his first errand. But now he was free to follow his own inclination. He would visit the old haunts one by one, and at least discover the clue to his friends' whereabouts.

He wended his way to the embankment. As he had vaguely expected, the out-house had disappeared; a large smithy had taken its place. He went up to the man who stood at the door with smoke-blackened face and arms akimbo, and put his question :

"Ricotte — Krantz — out-house?" said the man, shaking his head. "No, I can't tell you anything about them. I have been here only three months. I bought the place from a man who was using it for a timber-shed."

Undismayed, Camille passed on to the house where the Ricottes had lived. It had another concierge.

"My predecessor died a year ago," said the lady confidentially; "and ever since I have filled this responsible post to the great satisfaction of all the *locataires*. No complaints about having to pull the bell six times before getting admission after midnight—never a letter mislaid or gone astray, never. Do I remember a M. Ricotte? Though the name is familiar, I beg M. Ricotte's pardon for having the impoliteness not to remember him. He must have been here before my time. If Monsieur will be good enough to wait a little, I shall go to make inquiries among the lodgers."

"I shall be much obliged," said Camille.

Impatiently he tramped up and down the little parlour, very anxious as to the result of her expedition.

In a quarter of an hour she reappeared, red and breathless.

"I regret, Monsieur, that I have been only moderately successful. The tenants here change somewhat rapidly. They are ill-natured enough to say that the staircase is unsafe, especially in the dark, and that the ventilation comes from too many directions. But right at the top there lives an old street-musician who remembers a M. Apricot—wasn't that the name?—who stayed here with his daughter, a beautiful, grave-faced little girl. He moved, however, nearly three years ago, and the old man does not know what has become of him."

Somewhat sick at heart, Camille turned to go on. He had one more string to his bow. He knew where the club to which Ricotte had belonged, and to which he had intended introducing him, was situated. He reached the street, and, to his first question received the reply, that the "Egalité" had been dismembered long ago by the police.

This was terrible; one by one his hopes were being frustrated. What was to be done now? Disconsolately he sauntered on. Suddenly a happy idea struck him. He would go to the Boulevards and the great thoroughfares, where Fifine had been in the habit of selling her wares; he would frequent them—he would haunt them till he came across her. The thought filled him with new life, and he stepped out briskly—he would not lose a minute. Street after street he traversed, getting further and further from the working quarter of the city, to the haunts of the drones and the butterflies.

Gradually a confused hum as of a large crowd came upon his ears, and, on turning into a side street leading to one of the main crossings, he saw that the

mouth of it was choked up by a vast concourse of people, rendering further progress impossible for the present. Chafing at the delay, Camille wedged his way into the thick of the throng, until he was hemmed in on every side. He learned that these people were waiting to see a grand procession pass—a general's funeral. With a bitter smile he thought of the complaint Fifine had once made against him, for not telling her of the great public sights. If he only saw her now, he would have enough to tell her of what he had witnessed, away in the distant lands where he had sojourned.

So, resigning himself to the situation, he prepared to wait till he might resume his way in peace. For pastime, he began to study the faces of the folks around him. They were commonplace enough—nothing to interest him, till his eyes lighted on the profile of a man, standing some way to his right, two or three rows in advance, dressed in a working man's blouse, with his dinner-bag slung across his shoulder. There was a strangely familiar look about the face, and yet Camille could not fix it with any certainty. Craning and straining his neck, he endeavoured to get a better view, and the more he looked, the more the conviction gained on him that this was—of all people—none other than Krantz. Ah, he would make sure immediately.

"Krantz!" he called in low, yet clear tone.

The man turned sharply, looking in all directions. There could be no doubt of it now. In feverish excitement, Camille cramped and forced his way to his side, till he had come within an arm's length, where two burly Auvergnacs stopped further advance.



"Krantz, it is I—Camille," he shouted joyously. He saw now why he had not recognised him at once—Krantz had shaved his beard, which made him look ten years younger, and, moreover, he was in working man's attire—a fact which Camille never associated with Krantz.

"Oh, is it you?" said the latter, rather lukewarmly.

"Of course it is," cried Camille, almost jubilantly, quite indifferent to the irritation of the people in the immediate neighbourhood whom he had butted against, and the inquisitiveness of those beyond. "I am just back from the regiment; the whole morning I have been trying to find out what had become of you all, and just as I was going to give up, here I come across you by chance—what luck!"

In his eagerness he did not notice the look of annoyance on Krantz's face, nor the lack of cordiality in his words of welcome. All he cared for was that he would soon look into Fifine's eyes again.

"How is Ricotte?" he asked.

"Very well," was the abrupt reply.

"And—and Fifine?"

"Oh, Fifine? She's married."

"Mar . . ." The words died on Camille's lips. There was a sudden commotion among the crowd; the police were forcing them back before the advancing pageant, and when the mist had cleared from Camille's vision and he looked round for Krantz, Krantz had disappeared.

In another hour Camille was again facing M. Lavoisier, and saying to him:

"I accept the inheritance. You are right ; motives are out of place with people who have empty pockets."

What he said to himself was :

"God, give me ten times an empty purse, only curse me not with this emptiness of heart."

## CHAPTER THIRTEENTH

## *RETROSPECTIVE— THE MANŒUVRES OF KRANTZ*

CAMILLE had made one mistake, which, however—a thing that cannot be said of every mistake—did him credit; he had believed too implicitly in friendship. Other men have come to grief over the same fallacy, which tends to show that beliefs, even of the most honourable sort, are ticklish matters to deal with—not even excepting self-belief. The man who trusts himself all his length may, on trial, find himself quite a different character to what he thought. The application of this lies in the fact that Camille had trusted Krantz as he would trust his own self. And Krantz's breach of trust could shelter itself behind that most pernicious and hypocritical of adages—"Charity begins at home." And what this particular charity was will be apparent presently.

It must be confessed that Krantz had befriended Camille from quite disinterested motives. That he had occasionally given Camille the privilege of halving his monetary embarrassments and periodic impecuniosities was merely a subsequent matter of circumstance. And Camille had done it gladly,

and in the bargain had felt under an obligation to Krantz, as only a poor adventurer of a grateful turn of mind, who had been drifting without compass or anchor in the vastness of a great city, would be to the pilot who had first shown him where to harbour. Those two years of companionship in the out-house had reconciled Camille to much in Krantz, which he naturally might have looked askance at—his thriftless habits, his idleness, his unmanly dependence on another man's liberality, however much claim he had on it. In fine, he had taken him for granted. Krantz had set Camille down for a well-informed country booby, of whom opportunities might make a man, but whom circumstances had depressed to the level of a plodding unemotional drudge, whose chief joy in life was to be a beast of burden, with the ultimate prospect of harnessing itself in gilded traces. He admired him one moment and pitied him the next, always reserving to himself the right of interchanging both feelings for one of contempt.

And, therefore, Krantz was astonished, not to say indignant, to ascertain that Camille, had sufficient plasticity of temperament for a Romeo, and that the Juliet to whom he aspired was the very one he himself had long ago, all things being equal, come to look upon as his own peculiar domain and property. Naturally, he resented any poaching on his preserves. The other waifs, whom Krantz's whim of gregariousness had prompted him from time to time to select for his room-mates, had, as a rule, left him after playing him a dirty trick, and had withheld all acknowledgment of his favours when their chance came.

Camille had been grateful enough—Krantz did not deny it, but to discount his gratitude there was this monstrous presumption of his, by the side of which the ingratitude of the others shone as a virtue.

“One day I shall be old,” ran Krantz’s argument. “An old age without some one to love is hell upon earth, and I am too much of a coward to shorten my life by an inch. I shall want a woman’s tender care. There is a wonderful comfort in the rustle of skirts ; one fancies it is some angel fluttering its wings somewhere near by. I am too lazy to go afield to look for such a one ; moreover, it would be folly when one can find her by just stretching out his hands. I have watched Fifine grow up ; I know every nook and corner of her nature. She will make me a good wife ; I shall make her a better husband ; so let me bide my time.”

And while he was biding his time, Camille had come that evening with his confession, and had startled him out of his fancied security. He had a rival in Camille ! The thing had at first made him laugh ; but he soon thought it best to look at it in its proper light ; and hence he took precautions. He now saw the reason why Camille was shirking his military service, although, on his own admission, he had no longer the excuse of having his father depending upon him ; and, therefore, as a strong patriot, he thought it a good opportunity to give his country a useful soldier, and by this act of virtue also to rid himself of unnecessary competition. There was, of course, nothing culpable in the deed except the way it was done ; and here, again, Krantz

might have defended himself with the Jesuitical—"The end justifies the means." Then came further developments which necessitated further departures.

It was a few days after Krantz had sent information against Camille to the Department of War. The evening was far advanced, and Krantz was waiting up for him. The official-looking envelope had arrived in the morning; he knew what it contained, and was curious how Camille had taken the notification. It was past midnight, and Krantz was just divesting himself of his boots after closing up for the night, when he heard Camille's familiar knock outside. Quickly he unbolted, and as the door opened, he started back with a cry of terror, as Camille—or, rather, the semblance of his ghost—staggered in.

"It is nothing," gasped the lad; "my nerves are just a bit out of joint. I shall be all right to-morrow."

Without another word he crept into bed, where Krantz heard him lie shaking, shivering, teeth-chattering all through the dark. Camille never knew how many hours he had been swooning on the river-sward; he only knew that it had taken him years to accomplish the distance back to the hut through the mist and chill of the autumn night. And so he felt not a bit surprised to find in the morning that there was a weight of hot lead somewhere in his cranium, and that his eyes looked on things through a curtain of gauze.

Krantz was profoundly alarmed; he had never anticipated such a result for his action. They had discussed Camille's eventual conscription on various occasions, and Camille had spoken of it with manifest

indifference. Was it the prospect of parting from Fifine that could have wrought such an effect? Anyhow, Krantz felt it his duty to repair the mischief as far as he could, and through the instrumentality of Ricotte, whom he informed of Camille's indisposition, a doctor came to see the patient that afternoon.

"Oh, we shall pull him round in a day or two," the doctor had prognosticated, with the same sanguineness Camille himself had affected; "it's only a kind of nerve-ague; the strongest constitutions are subject to it."

But the afternoon passed, and as the evening dragged on, Krantz saw that a man who breathes two hundred times in the minute, and whose face is simply aflame with colour, can have no immediate prospect of recovery. So he watched him anxiously through the night, and fetched the doctor again, first thing in the morning.

"I can't understand this," said the latter with a troubled look. "My diagnosis was wrong, it seems. He must have had a tremendous shock, and it is turning into brain-fever. We must be careful; pity he can't be moved."

Krantz was in a sad plight. If Camille died it would be he who had killed him. So he prepared to nurse him with the utmost solicitude. Presently, Camille began to rave—wild ravings, which harped on an entirely different topic to what Krantz had expected.

"Only a sou," he heard him say; "just one to get him buried like a gentleman—it's as much as I gave the old beggar that night when he came to me

whining. Look out, there! mind the floating buoy; there he goes—bang against it. Hold up a minute while I take my coat off. I'll save you—no, I won't, you made me feel a parricide; I shall be revenged—you shall drown. 'Help,' did you cry? Once more—that was for the last time—now he is going down—down—and still down—to the bottom! Won't you let the vortex fill up? Take his face away, and it will close again—no, no, don't come nearer! Why, your arms are getting so long—you are clutching my throat, I say—let loose, let loose, or I shall choke!"

Krantz listened in astonishment. He had thought there would be something about conscriptions and heart-aches and Fifine; but this was utter drivel of which no human soul could make head or tail. But on the fourth night, while he was beguiling his vigil with a newspaper, a sudden light flashed upon him. There it stood in print for every one to read: "At last the body of M. Albert Clairmont, son of the well-known millionaire, who met his death by drowning some days ago, has been found ten miles down stream. The deceased was taking exercise in a rowing-skiff for the benefit of his health when . . ." and so it went on.

Evidently Camille's random utterances were something more than the ordinary hallucinations of the fever-stricken. They showed such intimate knowledge of the circumstances attendant on his cousin's death as to imply that he had been an eye-witness of it, if not . . . Krantz gasped. Great God! could it be? He knew of Camille's hatred against his flint-hearted relatives, and combining



this with the evidence of his delirium, there could be no other conclusion but that Camille, in some way or other, had a hand in compassing young Clairmont's death. Ah! here was a stronger reason to account for his unhinged mental state. Krantz almost laughed with glee to find he could absolve himself from any blame in the matter, and generously refrained from feeling resentment against Camille for causing him an unwarranted fright.

But the discovery justified him in another course of action. Ricotte and Fifine had called frequently, but, of course, Camille had not recognised them. Now, however, that the acute stage had been passed, and Camille was likely to regain his balance of mind, Krantz thought it distinctly desirable that this communication should cease. Although he himself was sufficiently catholic not to disdain rubbing shoulders with a supposed murderer, he felt a strong call to save Fifine from further contact with him. Hence, on the pretext that it was the doctor's strict orders to avoid all excitement for the patient, he prevented Fifine and Ricotte from visiting the hut, and when Camille fully regained consciousness, and eagerly asked after his friends, he had been answered that father and daughter had gone into the country without leaving their address, and were not expected back for two months. Camille's surprise was great; had he not had the intelligence from Krantz's own lips, he could hardly have credited this deviation in the methods of the Ricotte establishment. His convalescence went on rapidly, and by the time of the conscription the doctor declared him fit for joining. Camille was on tenter-hooks—he would

have to leave without seeing Fifine again. Each time he asked Krantz about the Ricottes, he received nothing but negatives and shoulder-shrugs in reply. And so it was that he had not spoken to Fifine since the evening when he had vainly tried to explain a man's heart to a child's brain.

But he was determined on not leaving her without a farewell—a one-sided one, it was true, but better than none at all. He embodied it in a letter he wrote her on the morning of his departure, and which he commissioned Krantz to deliver. And, of course, the first thing Krantz did—after the last hand-shake at the station, after the tail-end of the train had disappeared round the curve—was to open the missive, and to read its contents. He might have destroyed it straightway, but he thought it would give him a better insight into the true state of affairs.

"Dear, dear Fifine," it said; "I have had to go away without seeing you, without bidding you good-bye, and I feel like an outcast who is thrust forth into the world with no one to care whither he goes or whether he will return. I think you will be a little—a very little—sorry that I am gone, but if you would multiply your regret a thousand times, it will never reach the size of mine. And now, remember to keep your promise, and to think of me kindly—as kindly as you can. I don't suppose I have deserved otherwise, because I have always tried to be good to you, and I should have been ever so much more good to you if you had only let me. We shall not see each other for a long time, but when I come back you will be a grown-up woman, and then I am sure you will know what it means when

one can't 'do without' another. So think of me very, very often, and answer my letters when I write to you. Give my best regards to your dear father, and take all that is good, and wise, and true in me for yourself. Ever yours faithfully, Camille."

The perusal of the letter had been of use to Krantz in one respect, at least, as it reminded him of the probability that Camille would write from the regiment. That meant keeping up communication, the very thing Krantz wished to do away with. It was just as well that Camille should pass out of their lives without leaving a trace, and so Krantz took his measures accordingly.

The evening of Camille's departure he went to the Ricottes, the first time since some days.

"Well?" he was received with, both by Ricotte and Fifine.

"Well what?" asked Krantz negligently.

"Your patient—may we come to see him now?"

"The patient left to-day for his regiment."

"But you told me the other day he was at death's door," said Ricotte, astonished.

"So he was; but these provincials have queer constitutions; they take very sudden turns for the worse or the better."

"H—m! I didn't know they were differently arranged internally to us townspeople," and Ricotte's voice showed strong traces of chagrin.

"But why did he not come to see us before he went?" asked Fifine.

"Yes; why did he not come to say good-bye?" echoed Ricotte.

Krantz gazed at his boots with a great show of reluctance to explain.

"Well, if you wish to know the truth," he jerked out, when their expectant silence had had time to become irksome; "if you wish to know the truth, I must tell you that your Camille is a bit of a scamp."

"My Camille?" asked Ricotte.

"Well, then, Fifine's," and Krantz shot a quick glance at the girl's face.

"What have I to do with him?" The tone of her answer was hard and unsympathetic, which Krantz noted with considerable satisfaction.

"If you both disown him," he said with a laugh, "I suppose I must take him on my own shoulders—scamp or no scamp. The fact is, he has been out and about these last two or three days. I asked him if he was not going to see you, telling him you had been to inquire after him ever so many times, and that it was only through you that the doctor attended to him gratis. And what do you think he answered? 'Look here, Krantz,' he said, 'for nearly two years I have been crushing stones, and the stones have been crushing me. After that, I have been living a slow death for over a fortnight, and now I have the pleasant prospect of a few years of imprisonment in a military uniform. I have just two days in which to feel I am alive, and, by God! I am not going to waste them in talking socialistic nonsense with Ricotte and to listen'—excuse me, Fifine—to the bleatings of his calf of a daughter. I am going to have my fling, and let the devil pay the score.' But in justice to him, I must tell you"—Krantz was afraid he had

gone a little too far—"that he was roaring drunk at the time."

Ricotte grew white to the ear-flaps.

"That comes of being a philanthropist," he shouted; "you pick up garbage from the gutter, you stuff it chokeful with kindness, and then it vomits ingratitude all over you. I warned you, you pig-headed fool, he would turn out like your other protégés."

"I only did my duty. I did not know they would not do theirs," said Krantz sanctimoniously.

"Socialistic nonsense!" resumed Ricotte furiously. "The double-faced hypocrite! How long is it since he swore—yes, swore in this very room that he would take up the cause of the people—that his sympathy was all with them—that—and now it is all nonsense! Ah, we shall not forget that, Monsieur Camille."

"Did he really call me a calf?" asked Fifine, with a pucker at the corner of her mouth.

"He did, the rascal! Do you think I dreamt all this?"

Fifine made no answer, but she set her lips very firm, and the pucker was caught as in a vice.

Krantz had reason to be satisfied with the impression he had produced. He thought it unnecessary and inadvisable to mention his suspicion of Camille having murdered his cousin. After all, it was only a suspicion, and Ricotte was a shrewd man, who required something more than conjecture before he became convinced. But Krantz thought it could do no harm to be still more look-ahead in his precautions. Camille's letters might lead to an explanation, and even if they did not, he knew

enough of Camille's nature to feel sure that on his return he would seek the Ricottes; after all, the term of military service was not for a life-time, and Krantz might find it much more difficult to bear out his fabrications in the face of the man whom he had maligned so cruelly.

There was only one way to escape that.

"I think you ought to shift your quarters," he said to Ricotte a day or two later, when they were by themselves.

"What on earth for?"

"You may think it strange," went on Krantz, speciously; "but I have an idea the neighbourhood is not healthy. Of course, it has no effect on a full-grown man like you, but there is Fifine to be considered."

"Why, she is the picture of health," said Ricotte, with, however, a touch of alarm.

"That may appear so to you, who see her every day, and therefore have no eye to any change in her. But remember, this is the critical time in her life; she is becoming a woman, and is most subject to pernicious influences."

"Do you think so?" asked Ricotte, with much anxiety. His wife had been taken from him with bewildering suddenness, and ever since his solicitude had made the slightest jeopardy of Fifine's health, real or unreal, a bugbear to him. Krantz had counted on that.

"Then what is to be done?" asked Ricotte.

"It's very simple; move to a cheap suburb, where you get an open space, where the wind has room to stretch himself to a decent size, and make one's

cheeks glow and the blood tingle. It need not cost you one sou more than you pay here, and you had better be in your new quarters to receive the winter, when he comes."

Fifine hailed the proposal with delight; it realised her dearest wish. She mapped it all out in advance; to live in the country, to bound along the frost-stiffened highways, along the paralysed hedges, to skim the frozen lake, or, in default, the largest water puddle in the neighbourhood, to feel the fulness of one's life, by contrast with the empty deadness of things around. And then, to watch the metamorphosis of the year, to see the hoary, rime-sprinkled world become rejuvenescent, to feel the new heart which God had placed into its bosom beating, at first very faintly—every heart-beat a daisy or a bird's trill—then stronger and more confident of itself and its purpose, throbbing into life the spring's delicately-nurtured progeny of birds and blossoms, pulsing through the sturdy strength of the summer, mellowing down to the self-contained maturity of the after-season—until, sear and sapless, tired and numbed, it wrapped itself up in its shroud of snow and died, content in its assurance of a speedy resurrection.

The very next day, Krantz and Fifine started on a house-search expedition. It was Krantz's resolve to make Ricotte move as soon as possible, though there was no immediate danger, for Camille believed father and daughter out of town, and had promised not to write till Krantz had advertised him of their return. But as Krantz did not intend telling him at all, Camille would no doubt, after a fair interval of waiting, write, and let his letter take

its chance of reaching them, and under the existing circumstances, it was a very good chance. And so within a week, Ricotte's *ménage* was established in its new abode.

Thus far, Krantz had only busied himself with measures defensive. He now proceeded to the attack.

"It's time Fifine should give up this flower-business of hers," he told Ricotte; "she is getting too old for it."

"Yes, old and decrepit," remarked Ricotte.

"Don't laugh; you know what I mean."

"I don't."

"Well, then, as a man of the world you should; there is danger in the streets. When she was younger, her childhood protected her; but now—remember, Ricotte, you have only one daughter."

Ricotte beat his forehead. "Fool that I am; to think I did not see that long ago. Krantz, you have done me a great service, I thank you."

"Don't thank me," smiled Krantz, taking the proffered hand; "perhaps I'm not doing it for nothing—I may ask payment for it one day."

"And what you ask you shall have; all that is mine is yours. I have not forgotten the old debt either."

The result was that Fifine now stayed at home all day. Whatever might have been her view of the change, she would not dream of gainsaying her father's decision. And a change it was. After the brain-dizzying turmoil of the great thoroughfares, after the glare and glitter of the tricked-out boulevards, the stillness of their abode was, to her, as that of a cloister. And the consequences soon



became apparent. Little by little, but none the less effectually, Fifine stripped from herself, as a snake casts its slough, all that was hoidenish and irresponsible in her manner—the contagion of the streets. And now that she had the leisure for it, she applied herself strenuously, with Krantz for her guide and preceptor, to realising a long-cherished ambition—to acquire knowledge, much knowledge. She would not go blindfold through the world. Since she had been sent to live in it, she might as well know the best it contained, what it was most worth while living for. And when she knew what others had said of it, she would be better able to think it out for herself. So she looked deeply into books, that are the mirror of life, and by dint of much reading, and more thinking, her mind expanded, her vision became clearer, she could cope with things that lay far beyond the reach of other women in her sphere. And that, again, made her pervade her province of domesticity with a subtle sweetness, an ineffable grace, which transformed the little home into a *Paradise à deux*, with Krantz thrown in for the sake of variety. Whenever Ricotte came home from his work, she was ready for him at the door to kiss the wrinkles of weariness out of his face, and more than once Ricotte felt his heart welling over to Krantz in gratitude for his foresight. And one evening, when Ricotte had said as much to him, while Fifine was busy in the kitchen, Krantz thought that the time had come.

“I must tell you a secret, my dear Ricotte,” he said; “I can’t keep it on my chest any longer. I suppose you will hate me when I acknowledge to

you that my action in the matter was due to the deepest, blackest, most calculating selfishness."

"How do you make that out?"

"You say you owe certain things to me, and I once told you I should ask for payment some day. Well, Ricotte, I am going to be as exacting as the Hebrew in the play; I will take payment of you in nothing less than flesh and blood."

Ricotte looked astonished. "You want to . . ." he began.

"You are startled; yes, I want to take Fifine away from you—or rather we shall share her between us; and when I told you to treasure her up at home instead of wasting her on the streets, I was only asking you to save her for myself. There, I have admitted my guilt; what is your sentence?"

Ricotte tried to scratch the bewilderment out of his head. "This is something I never anticipated; of course, there is nothing preposterous in the idea," he said quickly, in answer to Krantz's look of tight-strung expectation; "but—but there are difficulties."

"What difficulties?" asked Krantz sharply. "Do you think she will object to me? You know you have only to command her."

"Yes, yes, I know—but she is so young."

"An objection time will remedy. I don't ask her of you at once. I shall be content to wait, say two years—even three. She will be nineteen, and I thirty-six; there is nothing abnormal in that."

"No," said Ricotte, and became silent again.

Krantz felt there was an after-thought lurking in the other's mind.

"Ricotte," he said, "remember there is no compulsion in the matter. I shall not press my claim if you wish to take your word back."

He knew well enough Ricotte would never do that.

The latter looked up resolutely. "It is just this, Krantz. While she is my daughter I must look to her wants; but one day she may become an orphan."

Krantz understood. "And the wife of a thriftless idler, who has not known what work means for the last ten years, you want to say."

He thought of the appeal Camille had once made to him to lift himself up to a consummate effort for independence, and how he had replied he needed a strong lever for that. He knew what and whom he had meant—he had meant Fifine and none other, and once he possessed her, in deed or in promise, he could feel confident of himself. And that was what he told Ricotte.

"Now that I shall have something to work for, you shall see if I can work. I have been an improvident fool long enough. Do you agree on these terms?"

"Yes, on these terms. My daughter's husband must be a working-man"—Camille's phrase came into his head, "a working-man, by the grace of God"—"understand that. And, in conclusion, not a syllable of this to Fifine till she is three years older."

Krantz was as good as his word. In his youth he had had the run of his father's workshop—a

tanner in a fair way of business. He ransacked his memory for what he still knew of the trade, and found employment within a week. Him, too, the change benefited in more ways than one. The steady exercise gave tone and vigour to his body, and he carried himself upright like a man who has great responsibilities resting on him, and greater ones in store. Some time ago he had persuaded Ricotte to dispose of the out-house; for one thing, because it was getting rickety in all its joints, and for another, because, considering Ricotte's views, it was inconsistent in him to be a landed proprietor. Then he had rented a garret close to their establishment.

Fifine watched his transformation in surprise. She had never seen Krantz move so briskly, she had never heard him laugh so cheerily or talk with so much animation; and when, one evening, he came in with his beard shaved off, his hair neatly trimmed, spruce and smart in his corduroy jacket, she clapped her hands in approval.

"Why, Krantz," she cried, "you are getting quite young and handsome! I always had an idea you were a tumble-down old man."

"Presently I shall be quite as nice as Camille—eh, little one?" he asked in a spirit of perverseness. Involuntarily he tried to measure himself against his absent rival.

A look of vexation came over her. "You can make your own comparisons if you like," she said quietly.

"So did he; he called you a calf, the impertinent . . ."

"On your own admission he said it when — when he could not choose his words well," she said almost fiercely, making a periphrasis for "drunk" — she hated the word.

Krantz went off abashed and uncomfortable ; it was the first indication he had received that his battle was not yet won all along the line.

So the first year passed, then the second ; the third was approaching its close, and Krantz thought it time to come to a final arrangement.

When he broached the question again, Ricotte looked at him with eyes full of tears and pleading.

"I know you are only asking for your due, but I throw myself on your generosity. Look, she is my only child—let her be my child a little longer, say for another year ; and when you ask for her then—well, I shall not haggle again."

And Krantz, feeling it would be politic not to insist too rigorously on his claim, consented to the delay with the best grace possible.

In the meantime Camille had been scorching under African skies, with the deadly Simoon for his next-door neighbour, with the coarse regimental jests ringing in his ears, with scenes of riot and debauch defiling his eyes—doing his duty mechanically, and feeling aloof and solitary in the whirl of this tumultuous world. Only when, wrapped in the stillness of the night, he paced his stretch of sentry-duty, did he feel in his element. For only then could he allow his rebellious thoughts to clamber out of the caverns of his soul, and to range at will through his heart and head. He had no need to

check the convulsive twitching of his face-muscles, whilst doubt and fear and impatience were struggling with each other for supremacy. He could follow, undisturbed, in the wake of his desires that were ever dragging him through vastnesses of memory, that took him near, so near to the goal of his longings, only to mock him in the end with a maddening sense of the unattainable. Now and then, woven from the comforting peacefulness of the deceitful, inscrutable stars, there came to him a semblance of hope—

“To-morrow will bring me a message from her—to-morrow I shall know.”

But the morrow came and brought nothing. And then began over again the diurnal heart-wearing and brain-tearing, and the energy of unvented pain accumulated, the pent-up toil of the emotions congested and lay on his soul with the weight of mountains, until he could discharge it again into the all-comprehensive night, could feed again on the lying solace of the starlight, only to find in the grim reality of day that he had been feasting the Barmecide's feast, and that it had been seasoned with the flavour of ashes and Dead Sea fruit.

CHAPTER  
FOURTEENTH

*CAMILLE HAS HIS  
WAY*

"**I** WISH I were a medical man," said M. Lavoisier, standing, on the point of departure, in the hall of the Hotel Clairmont.

"A strange wish, coming from you," smiled Camille. "I don't think you have any cause to grumble at your choice of a profession."

"I mean, I should like to be one just for an hour or two; now that I have cured your affairs of their disorder, I should like to take you in hand and see what can be done to set you right."

"Thanks for your kind intentions, M. Lavoisier," replied Camille; "but I am in perfect bodily health."

"And mental?" asked the lawyer with the scrutinising glance that was the terror of every criminal whose bad fortune threw him into the way of M. Lavoisier, Deputy Public Prosecutor.

"And mental," repeated Camille, not knowing how hollow his voice sounded.

The lawyer shook his head dubiously.

"I suppose I must take your word for it," he said, "despite the contradictory evidence. Your eyes are sunken and haggard—you look as if you never slept. Moreover, there is a nervous restless-

ness about you that makes one think that—that—how shall I put it?—that you are not at peace with yourself. Excuse my plain speaking, my dear boy," he continued, laying his hand affectionately on Camille's shoulder; "what I have seen of you in the six months of our acquaintance has made me like you thoroughly. I wish to see you happy as I would a son of my own, if I had one."

"But I am happy," returned Camille, with something that sounded like despair.

"Then you have a peculiar way of showing it. You immure yourself, you make a hermitage of this palace. Now and then I succeed in dragging you out to make you acquainted with people—your uncle's friends—my own friends. Everywhere you are received with cordiality and kindness, and yet you are as stand-offish as a hedgehog. Each time I leave you after giving you a new introduction, I have an impression that you feel resentment against me as an officious old fool."

"That I don't," said Camille earnestly; "but I admit frankly that there is little of the sociable in my disposition."

"Then cultivate it—I know a good way how."

Camille looked questioning.

"By marrying."

"Yes, by marrying," repeated Camille mechanically.

"You think the measure too extreme?" asked the lawyer, half jestingly. "Well, let me recommend something else. Throw your house open—make friends, not acquaintances; you owe something to society, to your position, and—it is only fair to add



— to your uncle's memory. You don't want to acquire the reputation of an eccentric hypochondriac? You don't want to be talked about on the boulevards as 'that madman Clairmont'? You have every opportunity of being a power in society—in the State, I may almost say. Don't fritter them away."

"The world has got on very well without me all this while," said Camille; "it will do so still."

"But have you no ambitions?" cried the lawyer excitedly.

"When I was a labourer at twelve francs a week, I was ambitious to earn twenty-four, and to . . ." he stopped short.

"To what?" prompted the lawyer.

"I forget; it's so long ago."

An hour after his visitor had gone, Camille found himself still repeating the lie he had uttered: "I forget; it's so long ago." Long ago it was—perhaps a hundred years, perhaps a thousand, but forgotten? No, that he had not, nor would in another thousand. There was no danger of that; people were never tired of talking of wooings and marryings; even the prosaic old lawyer carried the word on his lip—and so long as they did, he must remember that his life had lost its aim, its ambition, the one thing he had thought worthy of wooing. All the luxury that had been at his command for the last few months was tasteless, lacked salt. It lay heavy on his body and soul, crushing everything within him save the one thought: "Fifine is married." It had possessed him since his fortuitous meeting with Krantz; it was as strong upon him now as it was when, after his

momentary bewilderment, he had dashed madly, recklessly into the throng that had swallowed up his whilom comrade to reach him, to hear him confirm the dread intelligence, to watch his lips fashion the sounds, and so to make quite sure. Day by day he had haunted the neighbourhood in the hope of chancing on him again. He did not want to be taken close to her, only to be shown a spot where he could see her from a distance, and perhaps the sight might act as a sedative on the tumultuous agony of his heart. All in vain—and then he returned home to his solitary splendour, and brooded till his broodings had burrowed a tunnel through his mind, by which they emerged into nothingness.

But one thing there was he could never puzzle out. True, he had loved the girl with the passion of a half-savage, in whose heart the teeming exuberance of Nature amid which he had grown up, had engendered, for counterpart, a headlong unrestraint of feeling. He had loved her with unreasoning volcanic fervour, chastened by the chasteness of her who inspired it. But all this had happened years and years ago, and it was in the order of things that the flame should burn itself to ashes, that the volcano should temper its fierceness. And yet, the crater still seethed and hissed and churned within him, unquenched, showing no abatement, admitting of no control. Was he indeed of such different make to all other men? And, furthermore, since he knew she was lost to him—irretrievably lost—what was this mad perverseness that kept him in the toils of a shadow, a recollection?

But the revelation came to him at last. One day

he was wandering from room to room of the house—a habit that had taken hold of him from the time he had come into possession. It was not to sate his eyes, to assure himself of the reality of his riches; it was merely his unrest prodding him from one spot to another. So he came to the apartment which he had always avoided with a vague fear, the one in which he had been told his uncle had breathed his last. Usually it was locked, but this time the key had been forgotten in the door. On the spur of his impulse, Camille turned the handle and entered as far as the middle. Something very black loomed large over the mantel-shelf, a picture set in solid ebony frame. Camille took another step forward, recognised it, and stood rooted to the spot, staring at the thing on the wall with a deadly fear at his heart. It was the portrait of his cousin, a dead face, yet cruelly life-like, and it returned his glance with an air of grim, malignant mockery.

“You might have saved me,” it seemed to say; “you did not choose to. It was rather serious, that little joke you played me, was it not, comrade?” •

With a sob of terror Camille tore himself away and scurried to his room, shutting it tightly as though he thought the apparition would follow him there. Baptiste had met him in the corridor and had asked him if he were ill. And the old servant had gone on, shaking his head, and thanking God that he was no millionaire, and, therefore, never had occasion to rush past people at such break-neck speed, and with so white a face.

In the solitude of his chamber Camille arrived

at the solution of the mystery. The very first thought that entered his mind gave him the clue of which he had been in search. If he had only one other human being to share his dread with him, the subtle unrelenting dread that had gripped him by the throat as he set eyes on—on that memory of the past, he would not feel afraid of it. If Fifine were there, he would take her by the hand, and together they would go to the abode of the horror; and in her presence he could endure to stand gazing at it for hours without a single tremor—nay, he might even feel merry and light-hearted, and sing aloud for very gladness. But it must be Fifine, and none other. And she it could never be; his heart told him so in loud, deep throbs of despair. He saw it all clearly now; this was to be his retribution—thus was he to expiate his crime. Not by the pangs of his conscience, but the pangs of a hopeless, impossible love were to be his punishment. It was terrible—surely a whole Sanhedrim of devils must have met to devise it. Not his brain, but his heart, was to be riveted to the rack, twisted, tortured, excruciated. And as the thought forced itself on his understanding, he buried his face in his hands, and almost shrieked aloud. If the brain got overstrung, it snapped—there was nothing to think with, one grew mad, and everything was blank. But the heart-fibres were as of iron; they could bear tugging and straining to any extent—had they not borne it so many years? They never cracked and made an end of it.

For the first time he began to take the measurement of his crime—the length and breadth and depth of

it. Was it really so great? Did the provocation count for nothing? Had not his cousin made him suffer agonies of death in the hour when he had hurled at him the pitiless refusal of his dead father's dying prayer? Did those who had no mercy on others deserve mercy themselves?

Well, it was vain to argue. The fact remained—life was sacred; not for a thousand offences against man and God should it be forfeited, except at the hands of those duly appointed thereto. And he had taken the right of reprisal into his own. There lay his guilt. He ought to have known it. Touchepas' calf might have taught him the lesson—life is sacred; and again—life is sacred. Once it had come to him by inspiration, when he imperilled his own for that of a man who had given him equal provocation—nay, whose death he was encompassing deliberately and of set purpose. Then it had come to him at the last moment that he was paying too high a price for his revenge. How blind he had been all along not to have seen that the episode of Pitoignac's had been intended for a direct premonition by which he should have profited. On the contrary, as he stood watching his cousin die, he had wilfully put from himself all thought of conscience, had purposely bolstered up his resolution with every particle of malice, hatred, vindictiveness his nature could muster.

And now he must serve his penance as best he could. One consolation he had: he would know at least when he was forgiven—when the ache in his bosom become blunted, when the one absorbing memory was dulled. And in the meantime he had

his wealth ; if there was plan and method in the retribution that had come upon him, there must be some reason why that had been given him. What purpose was it to serve—what part was it to act in his passion-play ? He looked round him with a hard, indifferent look. What use were they to him, these things of bronze and marble ? What sympathy, what message of hope rang from the cold unresponsive sound of the soulless gold ? Perhaps it was only another irony of his fate. He had come to Paris with the object of gaining wealth, much wealth. And then, as time went on, his notion of wealth had taken another shape ; it then meant a woman's love, which had become to him the most priceless possession on earth. So then he had given up his first-born desire with a light heart, first, because it seemed out of his reach, and secondly, because it had lost its value by comparison with the other. And now it had come to him, without the stirring of a finger, and the other—for which he had striven and suffered so much—lay far, immeasurably far, out of the sphere of his life. Yes, it was an irony of fate, and he thought he could hear the thing on the wall of the other room laughing close to his ear in demoniac delight.

Sick and heart-weary, he gathered himself up. Something must be done—anything that meant a moment's respite and distraction ; it was madness thus to consume himself in idle unavailing conflict of thought. He went up to his bedroom and unlocked one of the cupboards. There he had stowed away all that remained to him of the old life—his labourer's blouse, his red neckerchief, his thick-soled

bullock boots, his cap with the leather frontlet. Without giving much thought to what he did, he took them out one by one, and, half mechanically, exchanged them for the clothes he was wearing. He had kept these things—some impulse had prompted him to preserve them. Somehow they embodied to him all his past.

So he sallied forth into the street, not troubling himself about the astonished gaze of the footman who opened the hall door to let him pass out. As it was, no doubt, the servants talked enough about him, made him a stock-topic of conversation. Well, he would not grudge them the pleasure, but he laughed bitterly as the thought struck him; he, the millionaire, the omnipotent, the arbiter of many destinies, could not defend himself against being mocked, derided, pulled to pieces amongst his menials. "Such a peculiar man—such escapades—tramping his room all night—trembling like a leaf at any sudden interruption, and now finally masquerading as a common navvy. Who ever heard of such things?" Oh, it was glorious to be a hero of mystery and romance to the housemaids!

Quickly he strode in the direction of the working quarter of the city. He was becoming conscious why he had donned his old attire, why he was going to bury himself amid the haunts of squalor and poverty. It would do him good to feel himself once more on the spot of his early struggles, of his early hopes. His memory would perhaps conjure up for him the old long ago, and make him believe that things were still as they had been; that no eternity had passed since then. He was still Camille,

the quarryman, working against time to brighten the last days of his dear, good father, far away in the Normandy village. He still came home at nights to sleep on the straw pallet in the out-house ; there were still Krantz, Ricotte, and—yes, there was still Fifine.

He came past Madame Fluquette's booth ; it was shut up. Camille almost laughed as he thought of the ridiculous old spider, who had tried so hard to ensnare him in her matrimonial cobweb. He remembered her inexplicable attempts to ingratiate herself with Ricotte's daughter—the little fairy with the limpid eyes and the pouting mouth, as she had appeared to him then. His heart stopped beating. This, too, was the place where once, and for the only time, he had kissed that pouting little mouth.

It was tiring work to wade through the gum-like slush, and so he entered a cabaret, ordered his absinthe, and began sipping it slowly. Had he not more time than he knew what to do with ? The tavern was getting crowded. It was near night-time, and the working people who had finished for the day, were coming in for their evening meal. There was a buzz of conversation, a tinkle of glasses, a cheery clatter of knives and forks. Camille watched them curiously : he also had known, once upon a time, what it was to have an appetite. Close to him sat two men making tremendous onslaughts on their cutlets of horse-flesh. By-and-bye, when they had taken the edge off their hunger, they commenced to talk very softly, but Camille heard, and was struck by the sound of their utterance. They were conversing in *argot*. Camille had become



well acquainted with the jargon in the bygone days, and it now came upon him pleurably, like the welcome of an old friend. Suddenly a word reached him that set him tingling with curiosity, and after that they used it rather often. "Egalité" was the word. Why, that was the name of the club which Ricotte had frequented, and which, as Camille already knew, had been disbanded by the police! But there was a possibility that it had been transferred to another locality—societies of this sort had a constitution of leather—and possibly these two men were members of it. Camille set himself to listen with redoubled keenness. They were talking about some meeting that had taken place, or was to take place; and then—was it fancy or not?—but Camille's heart gave a great leap as the name "Ricotte" struck his ear, to be swallowed up at once in the continued flow of conversation. More he did not attempt to gather; he must wait for developments.

The two men had made themselves comfortable over their pipes, and were evidently in no hurry to depart. Camille was fully determined to keep them in sight. So he ordered another absinthe, and possessed his soul in patience. After an hour or so, he was rewarded. One of the men said distinctly: "We shall be late. Let us go."

And then the two rose and walked out. Camille followed a second after, before they had yet cleared the doorway. It was quite dark now, and so he had less difficulty in escaping their notice, while keeping close in their wake. After a walk of twenty minutes, one stopped at a street corner, whilst the other went on. His companion followed after a little interval,

till Camille saw him disappear in the passage of an insignificant little building half-way down the street, which had the appearance of a fifth-rate lodging-house. By-and-bye, other men came singly, and entered the same passage. Camille's suspicions became more confirmed. The "Egalité" was proscribed, and therefore, for greater precaution, the members had been enjoined to assemble in the most unostentatious manner possible. Probably Ricotte was among them, and if so, he had yet to arrive, or was already inside; more likely the latter.

Camille had heard too much of the ways of secret societies to attempt entrance. Unless he could give the password, he would run the risk of severe handling. So there was nothing to be done but to wait till the meeting dispersed, and then to watch his man. Opposite the house stood a hawker with a stall of cheap dainties.

"Do you stand here every day?" Camille asked him.

"To be sure I do, and I don't get rich on it either," was the reply.

"I will buy your concern of you," said Camille; "how much do you want for it?"

"You can have the whole thing for a louis, stand, goodwill and all," answered the man.

"I have just got so much," said Camille, handing him the coin. The man tested it carefully, and made off with all speed, afraid lest his strange customer might change his mind. Camille thought it would be safer, and look less suspicious, if he pretended to have some manifest business in the neighbourhood of the house, and from his point of vantage he would

be able to scan the men as they sallied out from opposite with greater ease.

Hour after hour went by, but Camille kept his post doggedly. A strange fancy had come into his head. He supposed that this stall was his sole possession in the world, and a great cowardice came over him at the idea. It was to him an unexpected and therefore a more painful echo of his old-time drudgery. He took no joy in his wealth; he was rich and he was wretched; but it was not much better to be poor and wretched. What would he have himself be? For the first time he realised that he did not know his own mind on the subject. But the fancy haunted him, and his perplexity distracted him, till he wondered how the time had passed when he saw the men beginning to dribble out of the house, one by one, as he had seen them go in. Anxiously he scanned them in form and feature. There was no Ricotte. The great bulk of them had gone; at long intervals the few remaining ones drifted out, until suddenly the lights were turned off, and with a heavy heart Camille prepared to make his departure.

Slowly he walked up the silent street, when presently he heard a step behind him, faster than his, and gradually catching him up—a peculiar, drag-footed step that seemed very familiar. By now the man was abreast. Camille turned for a hasty glance.

“Ricotte!” he shouted, at the same moment, almost hurling himself on the passer-by.

Ricotte put up his arm and stood on the defensive.

“Steady there,” he said; “who are you?”

"Don't you know?—can't you see? Why, it is I, Camille!"

"Well, even if you are, you need not throw yourself on one like a professional assassin," said Ricotte gruffly.

Camille stepped back, chilled to the marrow.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered; "I was so glad to see you."

The apologetic tone touched Ricotte.

"What are you doing here?" he asked in less ruffled accents.

"I have been back in Paris these six months. Did not Krantz tell you he saw me?"

"Krantz saw you? When?—where?"

"On the very first day of my return we met in a crowd."

"No," reflected Ricotte, "he said nothing about meeting you. Probably he forgot to mention it. Which way are you going? I must get home."

"May I accompany you?" asked Camille eagerly.

Ricotte pondered for a minute. He still felt a grudge against Camille; the memory of what Krantz had told him was yet rankling in his mind. But, on the other hand, to send him adrift for what might, after all, have been but the slip of a drunken tongue was carrying his resentment too far.

"Come along, then," was his decision.

They walked on in silence, Camille wondering all the time what made Ricotte so cold and distant—the same coldness and distance which he had noticed in Krantz after the event of their chance meeting. Ah, these townspeople—they lived too fast; their friendships could not keep pace with them.

"Where are you employed now?" asked Ricotte, breaking the silence.

A sudden fear struck Camille at the question; how was he to answer it? The questioner had just come from an assembly of subversionists, of social iconoclasts, and now he was to tell him that he was walking shoulder to shoulder with one of his abominations! Well, and what if he did? Had he so much more to lose than he had lost already?

"Where are you employed now?" insisted Ricotte.

"Nowhere."

"Yes, it's hard nowadays to find work," said Ricotte pityingly.

"I have no need to work; I am a millionaire." The words came out like a cannon-shot.

Ricotte turned quickly to look at his face. Was the fellow mad? But Camille's eyes looked sane and rational, only very, very sad.

A sudden light flashed on Ricotte.

"Arsène Clairmont was your uncle; he died some time ago," he hurried on without waiting for corroboration, "and left all his wealth to a nephew; you are the nephew."

"I am," was the calm reply.

Ricotte battled with himself. "Do you remember the last time you came to see us?" he asked, forcing his voice into harness.

"I remember," said Camille. Could he ever forget it?

"And what did you say then? Did you, or did you not swear fealty to the people's cause?"

"I did."

Ricotte burst into a hoarse laugh. "You are a

man of honour, to be sure! I congratulate you—perjurer!”

The word stunned Camille. When he recovered, Ricotte was twenty yards in advance. In a second he had caught him up.

“Listen to me for a minute, Ricotte,” he gasped. “I have not broken my oath. I am with you still, heart and soul. I did not seek my wealth; it came to me. And now that it has come, I hold it in trust for you and your cause. Take it, as much of it as you like; you know what a powerful ally it will make.”

“Take it!” said Ricotte with suppressed fury. “Have I not told you what money such as yours is coined of? I must remind you—your memory is bad: of blood and sweat and misery. Every louis of it means perhaps a ruined home or a human life. Take it! No, I want my fingers to remain respectable.”

“If it is the blood of the people, the people have a right to their own.”

“But it has become defiled; it is accursed now; it will work evil, deadly evil. Keep it, the people have no need of your charity. They are richer than you; they are inexhaustible. They can shed their blood more freely, more quickly than you can mint it into gold. And they are proud, too, proud as a giant whom a handful of pigmies have surprised in his sleep and have bound in chains; he will not beg for his deliverance; he will ask no help, but, silently, mightily, he will wrench at his bonds till he has snapped them; and then—woe to your pigmies!”

Camille walked on, crushed and helpless. He had

anticipated an outbreak, but this fierce implacability exceeded his expectations. Unconsciously, they had traversed the more populated parts of the city and had reached the outskirts. Not another word passed between them till Ricotte stopped before his dwelling.

"I live here," he said curtly. "Good-night."

Desperately Camille held on to his arm. The question that had been burning on his lips all the time was still unasked.

"Where is Fifine?"

"Where should she be? With me, of course."

So she and her husband were living with Ricotte; but why the "of course"?

"Fifine and I have always been good friends, Ricotte," he said hurriedly, so as to hide the trembling in his voice. "You are angry with me, but be just. She has no quarrel with me; let me come in and wish her happiness."

Ricotte wondered at the strangeness of the phrase; he also thought how drunk Camille must have been at the time he had uttered his insult against Fifine, or else he would not have felt so confident that she had no cause to quarrel with him.

"If you are bent on it, you may," he said finally.

Camille crossed the threshold, pressing his hand to his side against which his heart was thudding like a hammer on an anvil.

"I have brought you a visitor," said Ricotte, throwing open the door and stepping aside to give Camille room for entering. With a reel Camille walked forward. His first glance caught Fifine sitting on a footstool; his second, Krantz standing

at the window. The latter shrank back, pale and agitated; where—how—had the two met? Had an explanation taken place? Ricotte's face looked dark and threatening—how much did he know of the truth? From the tone in which Ricotte had announced Camille, he could augur nothing except that he was very much vexed.

Fifine had risen slowly and was coldly holding out her hand to the new arrival; then she looked at his face, saw the abysmal unhappiness that lay upon it, and involuntarily her hand closed over his with a tight grip. The grip awoke Camille.

"I—I congratulate you," he said with drooping eyes. "Where is your husband?"

Fifine stared at him with wide-open eyes.

"Have you come here to make fun of me?" she asked at length.

Make mock of her? What did she mean? Could they not all hear the pitiful quiver in his voice as he spoke?

"I was told you were married. Krantz there told me," he said.

Fifine and Ricotte fixed questioning glances on Krantz. The latter felt he was in a terrible predicament. When he told Camille the lie, he did not anticipate being taken to task for it, no more than for his previous calumnies; but now it would all ooze out, and he would stand unmasked. And, therefore, he felt the necessity of collecting every atom of resource, scheming, diplomacy of which his brain was capable.

"My dear Camille," he said smoothly, coming forward, "I am very pleased to see you, although



you have been ignoring me all the time you were away, and don't seem very eager on renewing our acquaintance now; but, really, I don't understand this. I told you Fifine was married! Why should I tell you such a ridiculous untruth?"

Camille stood dumbfounded. "Did you not tell me so the day I met you watching General Brissac's funeral?" he gasped.

Krantz shook his head. "I am positive I have not set eyes on you since the day I bade you good-bye at the station."

Camille felt the room go round. Was he mad?—had he dreamt all this? Perhaps he had become the victim of hallucinations—perhaps he had got into the habit of seeing and hearing things where there was neither sight nor sound. It was quite possible; he had suffered so much—he had gone through so much stress and strain, that it was quite likely his senses had been shifted from their hinges. And yet it had all seemed so real—he could have sworn to it with his dying breath; had it not almost made him die?

"I don't understand this either," he said, passing his hand across his face; "but, if you insist on it, Krantz, I suppose I made an absurd mistake. The man's likeness to you was so strong."

"My type of physiognomy is not so uncommon but that I may have a double," said Krantz, speaking jauntily, with the relief of danger safely tided over. "And now, pray, tell us all about yourself—what are you doing?"

Ricotte answered the question. "Oh, he has taken to a splendid profession; he's a millionaire now,

by all that's holy. Old Clairmont left him his money."

A stillness of death followed the announcement. Fifi had settled back on her footstool, her eyes cast down over her needlework, but now she shot a half-frightened glance at Camille. A millionaire, and yet he had dared to come amongst them, as though in their eyes he were not outlawed and proscribed! As for Krantz, he had felt a thrill run through him at the words—a thrill of joyful surprise. Now there was nothing to fear; he knew at last the meaning of the gloomy look on Ricotte as he had entered; it meant sullen resentment against his rival. Camille was out of the running, that was clear. In the last few years Ricotte's hatred of the classes had risen to a perfect mania; it had become his creed, his religion. He would not give his daughter to one of them, even if he had not irredeemably promised her to the man who had a long-standing, inalienable right to her.

"Is there really something so terrible in it?" asked Camille looking around.

"Nothing very terrible," answered Ricotte, "only everything hateful."

"But if you hate the wealth that has become mine, must you hate me as well?" cried Camille. "Look, Ricotte," and he stretched out his arms pleadingly, "I would gladly be one of you, work and toil for your good! It is you who cast me off—it is you who reject me! I have no friends in the world save you—without your friendship I should feel a pariah. If I have forfeited it, give it to me again on trust; you shall not be

deceived a second time. Let me come amongst you, and I shall be grateful to you as for my very life."

Fifine gazed at him with humid eyes; did she not guess what he meant? In the three years that had passed she had become a woman, and she understood now, as Camille had foretold her she would. Oh, how she pitied him, and yet she hated herself for her pity—almost hated him for having aroused it. Why did he wish to step into her life again? Now it was useless, purposeless—trebly more so than ever before. Unless, of course, she was mistaken, and it was after all not for her sake, but for her father's, for Krantz's, that he was pleading so hard. Without them he was friendless—he had said so, strange as it might sound; but her woman's instinct told her which way the truth lay.

"Let him come, father, if he wishes it so much," she said. Her tone was commonplace enough, but Camille thought the voice of Mercy would plead like that for mankind on Judgment Day.

"I bear you no grudge, Camille," said Ricotte quietly; "you have not sinned so much against us as against yourself. I shall leave it to you to make your reckoning with your conscience. Come here as often as you like."

"A thousand, thousand thanks, Ricotte," said Camille, while the colour crept slowly back into his cheeks. "And now, having gained so much, I shall ask more. When a generous man confers a favour, he does not stop half way."

"I don't follow you," said Ricotte.

"I shall be coming here—I shall be amongst you, but your faces will always seem to say: 'We tolerate

you ; we do not object to your being in our company, but we cannot be in yours.' ”

“ Why, this is nonsense ! ” retorted Ricotte. “ Don't let us fall to hair-splitting. What is the difference ? ”

“ None to you, perhaps, but a great deal to me. I shall not feel that you are associating with me freely and without after - thought, unless . . . ”

“ Unless what ? ” asked Ricotte quickly.

“ Unless you are occasionally my guests. ”

“ That means, visit you at your house ? ”

“ Yes. ”

Ricotte shook his head resolutely. “ Never, Camille ; put the idea out of your mind. If you lived in a kennel for which you had quarrelled with a mangy dog, I should come to you gladly. Men like me have no business in palaces—unless,” he added grimly, “ it's to give the owners notice to quit. ”

Camille smiled feebly. “ Then don't make it a matter of business,” he said ; “ surely *your* head is wide enough for another view of the matter. Don't refuse, Ricotte ; humour my whim, if you call it so, once, just once. It will set the coping-stone on our reconciliation. ”

Ricotte watched him curiously ; what was this strange fellow driving at ? It could only mean one thing. Camille was intent on testing him ; he wanted to see if his convictions would stand their ground before the display of a fabulous fortune, when he would only have to stretch out his hand and take of it to his heart's content. If he refused now, Camille would go away and say to himself :

"Oh, these men of soap-bubbles! bring them face to face with temptation, and their principles fly to the winds; or else, they refuse to breast temptation, and are cowards."

Oh, no, he must not be allowed to cheat himself with that belief.

"Very well, Camille," said Ricotte, with set face, "you have my word—we shall come."

"You .too, Fifine?" and Camille turned to her eagerly.

"If father goes, I shall go," she answered simply.

"And Krantz?" He looked round, but Krantz had disappeared.

"That will be all right; I shall bring him," said Ricotte.

And then Camille went. He longed to be alone again, and to set his head in its right place; at present it seemed hovering somewhere among the clouds. He had never had the sensation before, and it frightened him. Was that how people felt when they were happy? If so, it was not a thing to strive after, because there was a great deal of pain in it, of delirious intoxicating pain, as though one's soul were being born over again and were perishing in its birth-throes. He beat his fists against the railings and house-corners to make sure he was not walking in a dream. He shouted aloud to see if the passers-by would stop and look after him.

"Fifine is free—is free!" he shouted, but the words sounded inarticulate in his ears, because his lips were reproducing only the echo of them. The real sounds were uttered in his heart; there they rang clear and

distinct enough, a very pæan of triumph. He had seen her again, he had heard her, he had touched her, the incarnation of his night-watches, the embodiment of his tantalising fancies. He had seen her as he had pictured her—pure, modest, maidenly ; he had heard her, honey-sweet with melody ; he had touched her—ah ! what was he to say of that ? Nothing, nothing ; he could only dream of it, and that but dimly—imperfectly. But that was not all, not the past delight ; there was more of it to come—when he would do all these things again. Till then, only till then, he wanted to live and breathe ; after that they might bury him alive.

Baptiste was waiting up for him, and opened the door. If he had not thought he would frighten the old man out of his senses, Camille would have thrown himself on his bosom ; he would have paid a million for the privilege. He wanted to feel his breast throb against something human, to make sure he was not the only living thing in the world. Is there anything more terrifying than to be alone with one's happiness ?

## CHAPTER FIFTEENTH

## *A MEETING OF EXTREMES*

"I SHALL ask M. and Mme. Botin, the Lepelliers, and one or two others," said Camille, three days later.

"That was not my idea of a festive gathering," said M. Lavoisier, wrinkling his eyebrows. "What are you going to do with these dilapidated fogies? Young blood—young hearts—young legs—that is what you want. Because they happen to be leading monopolists in their respective industries, it does not follow that they will make interesting company."

"They will do for a start," said Camille; "later on we shall get more lively and dissipated. I forgot, though—I expect some others, people you don't know, very dear friends of mine; I was most intimate with them in the old days."

"Who—what are they?"

"Artizans," replied Camille curtly.

"I see," reflected the lawyer; "you think they would feel disconcerted in a more brilliant assembly?"

Camille made no answer.

"Well, then," continued the lawyer, "would it

not be better if you entertained them by themselves?"

"No!" cried Camille, almost angrily. "I want to show them that I am not ashamed to own them for my friends."

"Just as you please—just as you please; loyalty is a fine sentiment; don't think I wish to disparage it."

And M. Lavoisier went away, repeating to himself for the tenth time that this was the most unfathomable client he had come across in his long career. And indeed, Camille's arrangement of the intended gathering was the result of a deeply thought-out plan. He wished to show Ricotte that the people against whom his hatred raged most violently, the princes of commerce and manufacture, were, on closer inspection, not the ogres and cannibals he pictured them. And, therefore, the party was to be a small one, for thus there would be better opportunities for close contact, for amicable interchange of thought and argument; and, possibly, Ricotte might go away with views of greater tolerance, his fanaticism attempered. He had given Camille to understand clearly that because of his apostasy he was to be admitted within their pale and limit, not by right, but by privilege; a privilege that was precarious and might be withdrawn again on the slightest provocation. Was it then so utterly impossible to proselytise Ricotte in his turn? For without Ricotte there was no Fifine—Camille had learnt that as one of the fundamental lessons of his life. It would do away with so many difficulties. His thoughts of her were constantly shared by the



fear that had come over him while he had stood waiting outside the "Egalité" Club, pretending to be a stall-keeper—the fear of distress and poverty and hopeless drudging. Things were so different now. While he had thought Fifine lost to him, he had held his wealth cheap; it had no zest and flavour. But now the innate greed of man's nature was strong in his heart; he was like the miser who, in his desperate sickness, would have given every coin he possessed to be healed, and then, when he is on the edge of recovery, begrudges the physician's fee. Perhaps it could yet be accomplished—win Fifine and retain his fortune; and then all the wealth of the world would be accumulated in one man's treasury.

On the same day he went to take the Ricottes his invitation. It was early in the afternoon, and he had half a hope that he might find Fifine alone. His heart leapt into his mouth as he heard his knock replied to by her "Come in."

She seemed neither sorry nor pleased to see him. As she watched him enter, she thought there was still the same awkward, schoolboyish air about him; but the Camille who stood before her was not the Camille she had known of old. She had told him once that she liked him best in his workaday garb, with the marks of his toil like a badge of honour upon him; and when he had come the other night, rough and unkempt with his hours of watching in the open, clad in the tattered blouse she remembered so well, it had seemed that he had only gone out that morning and had returned at night. But here in the glaring daylight she saw him in his fashionably-cut clothes,

that sat on him like a disguise, and with a sudden rush the long interval of time that had separated them from each other poured itself out like a flood, on the billows of which she felt him floating away into infinite distance—out of her ken. Yes, this Camille was a stranger to her. She would have to make his acquaintance afresh; from that to friendship was a long road, and from friendship to—something else was, indeed, a far cry. •

“I am glad I found you. I want to ask if you could come to me the day after to-morrow,” said Camille.

“I shall give your message to father,” she answered calmly.

“Do you think it will suit him?” he went on anxiously. He had asked the other people for that day, and it would be awkward to make an alteration.

“Probably; Thursday is an indoor night for him. There are no meetings then, as a rule.”

“And how does he spend the evening at home?”

“Reading,” she replied; “sometimes, when he’s in the mood, he reads aloud, and we listen.”

“We?” he asked quickly.

“That is, Krantz and I.”

Camille was silent for a moment; his mind was trying to compass the picture she had drawn. Something in it seemed jarring on its unity; was it Krantz? Not Krantz exactly, but the thought of Krantz sitting there by her side, probably boring himself and not knowing what it meant to be in Paradise. Stupid Krantz! And yet, perhaps, there was more of Paradise in his stupidity.

He gulped down a sigh. "What does he read to you?" he resumed.

"His favourite literature; pamphlets on the labour question, books about social economy, the future of the people—all that kind of thing," she enumerated.

Camille listened in wonder to the business-like tone which showed that these things were more than mere names to her.

"Fancy your having the patience," he said with affected carelessness, though he dreaded her answer, for he judged it would give him the clue to her convictions. He judged rightly.

"Patience?" she echoed, lifting her eyes slowly to his. "I don't take that as a compliment. You think, I suppose: 'Here's a slip of a girl, who ought to be playing with dolls, and ought not to be allowed to handle anything but featherweights.' I have long left off making a toy of life, I tell you."

"And, therefore, you have made a bugbear of it," he interposed.

"Not at all; it does not frighten me because it's serious and 'solemn. I don't care for it in its other aspects."

"But what can you do to help its graver issues?" he asked. "I can understand it in your father; he is a man; he has thought it out and has come to his conclusions."

"And I, you mean, am merely aping him?" she said with flaming eyes; "he is a man; he has thought it out. Well, perhaps, there are few of us women who can think, but we make it up in feeling, and, therefore, we commit fewer mistakes. You want to

know how I can help? I can help those of my sex who have had their feelings crushed out of them between the mill-stones of toil. If that is left to the men, everything will be a failure. They don't understand us, they haven't the time to get a clear notion of what we aim at, of what we need. They will attempt, they will bungle, and then the two of us will play at cross purposes. And that will mean ruin. It is the men who begin and who achieve; it is the women who do all the intermediary work. Without them the task can never be complete."

Camille heard her dazed. Ah, three years make a difference; he had left her a child; he had returned to find her a woman, with a man's understanding and resolution. What a labour he had before him! What a victory—when it was won! He had often wondered of what stuff the Charlotte Cordays were made, and what they looked like in the flesh; he knew now, but he was no happier for his knowledge.

"Could I be of assistance in any way?" he asked, after the pause.

"You?"

He would have given a year of his life to know if it was astonishment or contempt that made her voice ring like that.

"And why not?" he demanded.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Have you ever seen people lift up a heavy load?" she said. "They stand under it—not over."

Wherever he turned, the charge of traitor met him; only she did not even pay him the compli-

ment of making it outright, as her father had done.

"Is that a fit way of carrying out your mission of brotherhood—by narrowness and hatred?" he asked bitterly.

"What else have you deserved at our hands?" came her question quickly. "We can forgive those whom God has made our natural antagonists, but not . . ."

"Not those who have made themselves so? I understand. And so you look on me as your enemy?"

"As the enemy of our cause."

"You mean it is the same thing, Fifine;" his voice trembled on the word. "Do you make no allowance for temptation?"

"None whatever," she said without hesitation; "how else are you to test a man but by tempting him?"

"I suppose you think I gave in without a struggle, Fifine. I don't ask you to believe my unsupported word, but I could take you to a man who will testify how I resisted."

"For how long?"

"For one day."

She looked at him in astonishment; after his words she had expected to be told of months of conflicts, of agonies, of self-searchings, of set teeth, and inch-by-inch yieldings. And now he stood ludicrously confuted by the evidence of his own lips.

"Yes, for one single day," he repeated sturdily, in answer to her look; "but that one day was an eternity to me. It cut me off from the past—it made me forget all that had gone before."

"One single day could do that?" she broke in, still more puzzled.

A joyous look came into his eyes; now he would be able to tell her everything—everything.

"Do you remember the question with which I greeted you when your father brought me here?" he began.

She nodded; she had indeed thought it a strange question.

"Where or how I got the notion that you were married I don't know," he went on quietly; "you heard Krantz affirm that it was not he who had given it me. It may be so, I admit; in my bewilderment and confusion I may have mistaken him for a stranger, who thought it a good opportunity to hoax me. But the idea rooted in my mind and made me desperate."

"And a millionaire," she supplemented. "I don't see the connection between that and my being married."

He looked at her long and appealingly. "Certainly not, if you set yourself deliberately to ignore what I told you long ago in the old days, before I went away—what I repeated time and again in my letters to you."

"What! You wrote?" she asked.

"Wrote? A dozen times. The first few letters remained unanswered, the rest came back to me unopened."

She reflected a little. "Ah, of course; we moved just about the time you left," she explained in matter-of-fact tone, and without noticing the graver drift of what he said. Here was her opportunity to reproach him for his discourtesy in not coming to bid them farewell; to take him to task for gratuitously insulting

her ; but she refused it—reproaches might flatter him.

“Well, I have them still,” he said ; “would you like to see them ?”

She shook her head.

“No ?” he asked, swallowing his disappointment. “Well, then, you can perhaps guess what they contained ; and all that I have spoken and written, I now swear. I love you, Fifi—I love you.”

“It is not the first time you have made an oath and broken it,” she said, looking him steadily in the face.

He writhed at the words ; again they confronted him like a *cul de sac* in a labyrinth, there was no getting beyond them.

“You are right,” he admitted humbly. “I have lost all claim to your trust. Give it to me, then, of your charity.”

“Of my charity ?” she flamed up again. “You call yourself a man, and beg ?”

“I must have it at all costs,” he cried despairingly ; “how else am I to gain it ?”

“By sacrificing other things.”

“Other things ? What things ?”

“Your wealth, for instance.”

He darted forward eagerly. “And then ?”

“And then you will in some measure regain the privilege of calling yourself a man of honour,” she said firmly.

“And what further ?” he insisted.

“Is not that enough aim and object in itself ?”

“It is,” he admitted grudgingly ; “and yet I should prefer if it brought me your belief in my love.”

"Suppose, then, it brings you my belief, on which you seem to set such store," she answered, looking straight at him; "and suppose that this belief is all the return I can make you?"

He dashed the moisture from his forehead, and stared fixedly before him.

"Well?" she asked, after waiting patiently.

"I would give up my riches," he said hoarsely, "if I could reconcile the act with my views. I keep it, not for my own good, but for the people's."

"Father told me that was your idea, but I agree with him. The people must work out their salvation themselves. They must do it unaided, it will strengthen them in brain and muscle, and in—what is even more—self-reliance. Once they are set in motion, they will move forward by their own bulk."

Slowly her words shaped themselves into meaning for him. He wondered they had the power to affect him as they did. Surely by now he ought to be seasoned to rebuffs; had his heart still not become sledge-hammered to the hardness of an anvil?

"Is that your answer?" he asked sullenly.

"It is; are you not contented with it?"

"As contented as a man would be with his death-warrant," came slowly from between his teeth.

"Well, then, think if I have more reason to be contented with yours. You refuse the condition suggested,"—she paused for a moment as though to give him a chance of disclaiming, and when he remained silent she went on,—“and think, perhaps, that the compromise will come from me?” She smiled in a way that could not but manifestly prove to him the absurdity of the notion.



Camille stood as though hewn out of stone.

She knew she would be doing him a kindness by sending him away. "Well, then, let the matter rest as it stands," she said, opening the door for him; "or, rather, as we have come to no conclusion, let us consider it unbroached. I shall deliver your message. Till Thursday, then."

He took her dismissal as a matter of course, not dreaming of making remonstrance.

"I am punished, and I have deserved it," he muttered in savage self-anger, as he got outside. "I have committed sacrilege—I have lied to her."

Yes, it was a lie he had told her—a cheating sophism. It was for *his own* good, and for none other's, that he hugged his wealth to him—for his own comfort, his own selfishness. How they were accumulating, these ironies of fate! Now that he had such strong motive to cast it off, it clung to him with tentacles of steel, the sundering of which would lacerate his soul—no, not his soul; things so mean and petty had no business with the soul. It was his weak, miserable flesh to which he was pandering. Where had it all gone, the power of self-denial that had been so strong in him only a few days ago? Why had he not given an unconditional "Yes" to her condition, and taken the consequences? He knew why—she did not love him; he was not dazed and miserable enough to let that escape his understanding. The hour was not yet for him to make the sacrifice; he must wait till she had learned to love him a little, only a little, and then let the devil take his millions and buy fuel with them for his workshop. He must give her time, give himself time; time would do

everything — would reconcile poles of difference ; would plane smooth ridges of obstacles ; would fill up caverns of misunderstanding. Other men have thought the same with even less justification.

Old Baptiste experienced quite a shock when he received orders from his master to make préparations for entertaining the expected guests.

"For the first time, since the young master was drowned, nearly four years ago," he told the other servants. "It's quite time the old house woke up a bit. It has been dead long enough. I am half-ashamed to go into the cellar. There's that Forty-nine Tokay ; each time he looks crosser and crustier because he is taken no notice of. I suppose he is boring himself to death. Never mind ; everything comes to him who waits. He is going to have his turn at last."

The old servant, who practically ruled the house, had all the superintending left to him. Camille had no patience for it himself. He felt incapable of everything except wishing time to pass quickly till Thursday evening. He longed for its coming even though he feared it, for he had a vague presentiment that it would be big with consequences, and develop his fate for better or for worse. Nay, it might be the crisis, the hinge on which his future life would wholly turn. So he went about, holding his breath, not daring to look backward or forward for fear he should venture on a forecast.

Thursday came. Slowly the day dragged on. Was there a spell on it? Was it going to last for ever? At length the afternoon waned. The shadows began to drop one by one, with scarcely a tint of

blackness. Presently they came more thickly—in handfuls, as it were; after that they swept down in mountainous masses, until the darkness came crowding in with the myriad shapelessness of night.

Camille watched it through the window. At last it was evening, Thursday evening. "They must come now," he said to himself, pacing the vast chamber, and feeling drenched and drowned in the flood of light that streamed down from the two gigantic candelabra. Every now and then he stopped, fancying he had heard the sound of an arrival. And then he resumed his marching and cross-marching; it comforted him; it made him feel he was walking forward to meet them—to meet her.

"Here's somebody—ah, not yet!" he sighed, as he heard the screech-voice of Mme. Lepellier at the foot of the staircase. By the time the lady had waddled up, he had regained sufficient composure to greet her and her husband cordially. "They will be here a little later," he consoled himself. "I shall have more of the pleasure of anticipation."

"I have bitter-sweet memories of this *Salon*," Mme. Lepellier was saying. "I have spent many a pleasant hour in it with your dear uncle."

"I trust you will spend as many more with his nephew," said Camille.

"If you will give me the opportunity," laughed Madame. "So far, you know you have not been very extravagant in your amount of receiving and visiting. I tell you, all the ladies in Paris are dying to make your acquaintance."

"Then let them die," thought Camille.

"Don't bother M. Clairmont," broke in M. Lepellier good-humouredly. "I suppose he has something better to do with his energies than to waste them in dancing attendance on you chatterboxes. We men, who have large interests to administer, know the value of time—eh, Clairmont?"

"To be sure we do," assented Camille, mechanically. He was just thinking how astonished M. Lepellier would be to hear on what his host actually did spend most of his energies.

"There must have been a considerable amount of labour to get through in arranging your uncle's affairs," said M. Lepellier; "of course, he was a most methodical man, still where such vast concerns are in question, there is always a little confusion. However, you have an excellent executor in M. Lavoisier. By the way, is he coming to-night?"

"I regret to say, no; he has an important action to-morrow."

"Yes, M. Clairmont," observed Mme. Lepellier, "your uncle was a man of method, but then there was scarcely a good quality he did not possess—charity to a fault."

"Quite so," said Camille grimly, and thought of the lousiness his uncle had once flung him, and of other things.

"And as for his son, your cousin," she gabbled on, "I never came across a more charming young man; frank, open-handed, generous; people had only to ask and he gave. Of course, but for his death, we might not have had the pleasure of your acquaintance, M. Clairmont. Still, it was a

pity such a promising life was cut short, was it not?"

"A great pity," mumbled Camille with clenched teeth. He had a horrible fear that one day he would blurt out his secret into the faces of chatterers such as these.

Madame was pretending to wipe the tears from her eyes. She had an attractive daughter, who, if Camille's cousin had not been so stupid as to get drowned, would have been mistress of Hotel Clairmont. The chances of that were now very problematic; the new heir, to all accounts, was a man who would not let himself be disposed of matrimonially without first being consulted, who would have to be reckoned with in matrimonial calculations, who would marry, and not be married.

Camille looked at the clock; it was past eight. Surely Ricotte was home from work long ago, and had had plenty of time to reach the house by now. Ah, there were more arrivals; perhaps it was they.

"The brothers Delacroix," said M. Lepellier; "I recognise their voices; lucky devils—made clean three million francs last week by a stretch of forest near Valence. They buy it, get it insured, bang comes a landslide! What a pity I did not take to timber instead of cotton-spinning!"

He sighed, and Madame, like a loyal wife, joined him in his expression of sorrow. Camille felt a twinge of disgust; surely there were enough pitiful things in the world; could not the man save his pity for a worthier cause?

"We apologise for being late," said the two new-

comers in a breath, as if they had rehearsed the apology coming along.

"You have not lost much, at least as far as the female element present is concerned," coquetted Mme. Lepellier.

"Madame is a host in herself," was the double-barrelled answer; everybody replies the same common-places to these stock compliments.

"And I trust she will soon be reinforced by Mme. Botin," said Camille. How much longer would he have to listen and reply to these inanities before Fifine came?

"Botin? A very worthy man," remarked Lepellier; "but I wonder how much truth there is in the report that he allowed his mother to die in the workhouse, while he had millions deposited at the *Crédit Lyonnais*."

"You can ask him now," laughed the elder Delacroix. "Here he comes, if I am not mistaken."

Camille had just time to hurry to the ante-chamber when M. and Mme. Botin puffed in.

"Are we complete now?" asked Mme. Lepellier, after interchange of greetings.

"Not quite," said Camille, battling down his disappointment; "I expect some very dear friends of mine yet. I trust they will not be prevented from coming."

"I trust" sounded conventional enough, but in Camille's heart it took the shape of an agonised prayer. Would Ricotte keep his promise, or had he repented of it? And further, would his plan work out satisfactorily? His ears were tight-strung with listening for the sound of their arrival; his

guests were entertaining one another. Only now and then a piece of wreckage drifted to him out of the conversation. One remark told him that they had lighted on the labour topic. He wondered how the other side of the medal looked; he knew the obverse face of it quite intimately. He drew up a chair to the side of the two ladies so as to be within immediate ear-shot of the men.

"The markets are so very unsettled," M. Botin was complaining; "risks are increasing by leaps and bounds."

"What else can you expect?" said the younger Delacroix. "We employers are the slaves of our employés; they hold us in their hands, and the rascals are beginning to know it."

"Which is entirely due to these cursed labour agitations," observed M. Lepellier; "the workmen are getting fiendishly ingenious in their organisations. They have their leaders, who can mould them to their will like wax. The dogs—don't we treat them with the utmost consideration? Don't we cut our profits as fine as possible to stop their bark? But the more liberal our concessions, the more impudent their demands."

"They are just a big hungry belly," said Botin.

"And want to be fed with monopolists," laughed the elder Delacroix; "but they will find us a tough morsel to digest."

"Anyhow, there is danger ahead," said Botin seriously; "there are men amongst them who are relentless in their hatred of us, who spend their lives in undermining our prosperity."

"Haven't they got some secret associations, the

members of which are sworn to destroy our power at whatever cost?" asked Lepellier with a shiver. "Dear, dear, there's anarchy in the air—rank, rabid anarchy!"

"Let them try," said Botin vindictively; "as long as we keep together we can defy them to do their utmost."

"It is not their doing their utmost that concerns us so much," observed the elder Delacroix thoughtfully. "Any decisive measure of theirs would work their own ruin. It is their guerilla warfare that we have to fear, the little ripples of agitation, not the great billows of insurrection. Is it not the petty acts of animosity and treachery that we find it so hard to lay our hands on?"

"You are right, Delacroix," remarked Botin; "but how, pray, can we safeguard ourselves against that?"

"We must adopt a conciliatory attitude, at least for the time being; if it comes to the worst, we buy their leaders."

"A good idea," came from Lepellier; "but are you so sure these principles are for sale?"

"A thousand-franc note will buy a kilogram of principles," sneered Delacroix. "Mice are caught with bacon."

Camille's heart beat quickly: was this an omen? was Providence playing into his hands? Unconsciously these men were making his rough path smooth for him; they had become his allies; he was almost tempted to grasp them by the hand in the fulness of his gratitude. Oh, if Ricotte would only come now! His fingers twitched convulsively



as though to hold back the minutes that were rushing by mercilessly. It was nine o'clock; if they did not come soon, very soon, he must give them up in despair, must waste the golden opportunity that might never come again.

What was that? His heart surged up into his ears. There was a confused noise downstairs at the hall-door—a tumult—nay, it was loud enough for a scuffle. And in the midst of it he heard the panting voice of Baptiste cry: "Back! back! you riff-raff!"

With one bound Camille was outside, just as another voice, choking with anger, rose up:

"I have come so far—I will come farther; stand away, you miserable hound of a flunkey!"

With two more leaps Camille was at the bottom of the staircase; in a moment he had scattered the troop of servants who had hurried to Baptiste's assistance, and was dragging Ricotte in by both hands.

"Here you are at last!" he shouted jubilantly; "and you Fifine," as he caught sight of the golden head under its coarse fichu. "Come in, Krantz; I have been waiting so anxiously for you all; I thought you were not coming. This way."

And taking Ricotte with one arm and Fifine with the other, he led them up past the dumbfounded Baptiste, past the open-mouthed retainers. Krantz followed behind like a man in a dream. Did all this belong to the lad who had once breakfasted on flower leaves for want of something better?

The other guests were standing in a knot at the top of the escalier, craning their necks to learn the

meaning of the strange disturbance. As they saw Camille coming up with the new arrivals, they fell back in dismay and astonishment.

"Surely he is not going to bring these ragamuffins into our presence? He must be mad," whispered Mme. Botin, getting behind her burly lord and master.

Mme. Lepellier tried hard to faint. "Quick, take me away," she murmured to her husband; "they reek of garlic."

"By Jove! I didn't know this was a fancy-dress ball," said the elder Delacroix to his brother. Then he caught sight of Fifine and went on. "Look at that princess disguised as Cinderella."

And, indeed, the trio made a strange group as they stood in the doorway, framed in the black oak of the lintel that threw them into strong relief. Ricote in his navvy's blouse, the light playing on his great horny hands, with veins like whipcords, his big, bushy head, with its piercing eyes, well thrown back, the whole man the very embodiment of rude strength and defiance. To the left of him, Krantz, jaunty, devil-may-care, his hands in his trouser's pockets, and his cap cocked on one side, his right eye almost shut with a half-quizzical, half-critical look, that seemed to ask the company assembled: "Hullo, what manner of animals are you?"

And, last, there was the girl, straight and upright, her great eyes staring in wonderment from her half-averted head, with her hands on her father's broad chest, as though to make sure of his protecting presence, and her skin showing gleaming-white

against the background of coarse mud-flecked calico. Of course it was her father, no one could mistake that : there was the same proud poise of the head, the same resolute cast of the mouth that showed its owner was not to be trifled with—a fact the brothers Delacroix observed with regret. Right at the other end of the apartment stood the sleek, well-dressed, smooth-groomed millionaires, and between the two, like an arbiter of peace, towered Camille, one hand extended backward, the other forward, as though beckoning both to advance upon each other. The group at the further end scarcely recognised him ; this man, who stood there with the triumphant mien of a victorious god on his face, was he the same whom, only two minutes ago, they had seen in their midst sad-visaged, preoccupied, the picture of dejection ? It only then struck them how discourteous their host must have been in showing so little pleasure at the presence of his guests.

The spell lasted only a few seconds. It was broken by Camille's voice that rang out loud and clear :

"At last we are complete. Come, ladies and gentlemen, let me make you acquainted with one another."

There was something ridiculous, the ridiculous that borders on the sublime, in the incongruity of the scene ; there was something inspired in the manifest way in which the host ignored the differences of those assembled here at his bidding. Perhaps it was that which induced Botin to step forward, dragging his wife by the arm ; then came the two Delacroix, and finally the Lepelliers, who resolved to accept the

situation with a good grace. Perhaps it was a joke on the part of M. Clairmont, a surprise—some novel form of entertainment.

"M. Botin," commenced Camille, "this is my very dear friend Monsieur Ricotte."

"'Monsieur' be hanged," interrupted the latter; "I am plain Ricotte, no better and no worse; you needn't put your tongue into kid gloves when handling my name."

"Very well, then—Ricotte," obeyed Camille, forcing a laugh, but without feeling any embarrassment.

Botin shot a quick glance at the Delacroix.

"Your name is familiar to me," he said; "did I not hear of it in connection with the agitations of the 'Egalité' club some years ago?"

"Probably," said Ricotte, with a quiet smile; "I am the man. I must return the compliment, though; I have heard of your name too. You are the man who has lately reduced the dinner-interval for the girls and children in your sweetmeat factories from half an hour to twenty minutes, and their day's wages from seventy-five centimes to sixty—a heroic feat, M. Botin."

"It's a lie," shouted Botin.

"Am I right?" asked Ricotte, turning to Fifine.

"Last week a crowd of them came to tell father of it," she testified, looking calmly at Botin.

"And to seek redress?" sneered Botin. "Perhaps your father would like to take over the management of my factories."

"I would take over with pleasure the management of your funeral," answered Ricotte, getting red in the face.

"That is a threat, and I shall treat it as such," cried Botin.

Lepellier saw things were coming to a climax, in which Ricotte would probably be the most active and prominent figure, and the consequence might be broken harmony, and worse still, broken heads—his own among the number. It was time to interfere.

"There, there," he crooned soothingly, "you both misunderstand each other; no offence was meant on either side. You agree with me, Clairmont, eh?"

Camille had been standing dumb and at a loss; he had not prepared himself for this.

"To be sure, Ricotte," he said with an effort, "M. Botin meant no harm; it is only a way he has."

"He called me a liar," said Ricotte; "well, perhaps that is considered a compliment among you," he went on as an after-thought, "but, remember, I am not used to M. Botin's ways."

"Fool that you are," Lepellier was whispering into Botin's ear; "why do you exasperate the ruffian? When shall we get another opportunity like this for drawing the sting of one of our gadflies?"

"I am sorry — I forgot," replied Botin. "I apologise, if you require an apology," he said aloud, stretching out his hand to Ricotte.

The latter considered for a moment whether he should spurn it or not. Then he took the proffered hand, and gripped it as in a vice, tighter and tighter, till Botin's lips puckered with pain, and the sweat started on his face. And still Ricotte squeezed, chuckling inwardly at the devilry of his

revenge. It was a splendid way of giving Botin an idea how the people, when their time came, would squeeze these garrotters, not by the hand, but by the throat.

"I am satisfied," he said at last; "I hope you are."

And then he let his hand go, for he saw, a moment more, and Botin would faint, and he wanted him to retain sufficient consciousness to feel the moral of the pressure in all its bearings.

Then the introductions went on without further hitch. Fifine almost laughed outright at the haughty stares with which the two ladies favoured her; their magnificence of manner, which in her eyes resolved itself into a grotesque stiffness, impressed her very little. She only wondered that such apparitions existed outside the show-windows of the modistes.

"How much longer are we to remain in this disreputable company?" asked Mme. Lepellier of her husband. "That girl with her bold eyes makes me forget the respect I owe to my matronhood."

"I am sorry, but you must constrain your feelings a little longer," was the reply; "we often have to get through a bit of diplomacy, which, if successful, as I have no doubt, will largely recompense us for our outraged sense of propriety. I only beg of you and Mme. Botin to leave us a clear field."

"Well," he continued, turning to the Delacroix brothers and to Botin, who sat solicitously nursing his maltreated fingers; "don't you think this is a providential dispensation? I wonder how Clairmont got hold of the fellow."

"A most extraordinary coincidence," said the

younger Delacroix. "We must take advantage of it. Will you do the negotiating, Lepellier?"

The great cotton-spinner felt highly flattered by this implied tribute to his powers of statesmanship; but he was not statesman enough to see that it was merely a case of belling the cat.

"If you wish me to, certainly; but may I beg of you all to give me the benefit of your advice before I begin?"

They had no objection to that whatever, and the council of war commenced.

Camille stood talking to Ricotte and Fifine, brimful of happiness. Had he dreamt a week ago that she would be under his roof to-night?

"What was your idea in bringing me into contact with these—beasts of prey?" asked Ricotte, pointing with his thumb contemptuously across his shoulder.

"If I had thought you would have any objection," began Camille anxiously.

"Don't worry; I have a fairly strong stomach. I have endured worse things without turning a hair. Anyhow, they ought to be grateful to you."

"Why?"

"For giving them an opportunity of shaking hands with an honest man; it must be quite a sensation for them." And he smiled as he thought of Botin's crushed digits.

"Believe me," said Camille, seizing on Ricotte's good humour, "they are decent folks enough. You should view them closer."

Ricotte took the advice literally, and turned round to survey the group.

"To be sure, they look decent and clean for the knackers they are, but," he made a grimace of disgust, "they have the smell of the shambles about them."

It was his idiom for Mme. Lepellier's garlic.

Krantz was finding things a little monotonous, he had all the complimentary phrases of Ricotte by heart, and could dispense with hearing them again. He had neither the courage nor the desire to join the group of strangers, who were talking so mysteriously and confidentially to one another over at the other side, and therefore felt thrown on his own resources for amusement. He had keenly enjoyed the collision between Ricotte and Botin with which the proceedings had opened, and was sorely disappointed that it had ended so tamely; nor seemed there any prospect of a new outbreak. Moreover, he had his suspicions; there must be a motive in the presence of these people. They were not here by accident, for he had overheard Mme. Lepellier confiding to Mme. Botin her regret at having accepted the invitation. Ricotte must be right in his suspicions of the purpose for which he had been asked hither, and which he had communicated to Krantz; Ricotte usually hit the nail on the head. Krantz glanced round him, and Ricotte's suspicion became a conviction in his own mind. He knew the demagogue's sentiments of class hatred were moulded of cast-iron, unshakable as rock. And yet, under extraordinary circumstances such as these, the thousand-and-one enticements, the subtle cajoleries of the place, the dazzling glare and glitter might leave their suggestions; the smooth-tongued aristocrats—and here Krantz stumbled dangerously



close to the truth—might lullaby his conscience to sleep with honied speeches. Who could guarantee that Ricotte would not change front, prove false to his colours? What if he accepted Camille's offers of ease and affluence, developed ambitions, and became dissatisfied with the idea of having a middle-aged skin-worker for a son-in-law? All these were possibilities, remote as the stars, perhaps, but the mere thought of them made Krantz quiver with apprehension. He must do something—something that would bring Ricotte and Fifine—why not Fifine too? One might as well do things thoroughly—bring them safely through the hour of their temptation. He racked his brains for a minute or two, and then strolled leisurely up to the buffet which just then Baptiste had taken it upon himself to preside over.

It was the sight of the wines and spirits which had suggested to Krantz a brilliant idea of how to exercise his self-imposed tutorship over Ricotte and Fifine.

"Have you anything strong here?" he asked.

"Various things," replied Baptiste glumly. He was still chafing under the indignity with which his master had repaid his attention to duty.

"Now, which would you say was the strongest?" continued Krantz smoothly. "You have the look of a connoisseur about you."

"I should say this was," replied Baptiste, mollified somewhat by the flattery, and holding up a bottle of his much vaunted Forty-nine Tokay.

"Is it very strong?" asked Krantz.

"It isn't wine—its fire and compressed whirlwind, my old master used to say; it goes down like oil, but a spoonful of it will make a dying

man live twelve hours longer. Would you like to taste it?"

"Not now, a little later; give me a light liqueur."

Then he resumed his peregrinations, waiting his time. Confound that Camille! there he was button-holing Ricotte and casting sheep's eyes at Fifine; the latter Krantz did not mind. In another few months, if all went well, Fifine would be his wife, and all this would be at an end. But just at present he was very anxious to get hold of father and daughter—to take care of them.

The next moment Camille gave him the desired opportunity; he was called away to see that the supper arrangements were such as he approved of, and now that Fifine was here safe and sound, he at length awoke to the fact that the entertainment of his other guests deserved some consideration.

Krantz glided up to the two.

"Rather slow this, eh?" he murmured.

"Not quite as lively as the 'Egalité,'" replied Ricotte.

"Well, come and get some artificial liveliness into you; have a drink."

"You have heard me refuse every offer of refreshment," said Ricotte; "I am sure Camille has pressed me enough."

"But I am not Camille. Don't be obstinate; where's the principle in refusing anything that goes cheap?"

"I can't forget to whom it belongs, and that makes it poison to me."

"That's where the point comes in; you can drink destruction to the rascals with the very wine they are

drinking themselves. Come, just for the joke of the thing."

He saw Ricotte was wavering; so without further ado he took him by the arm, beckoning Fifine to follow, and led them to the buffet.

"Which is the stuff I had before?" he asked Baptiste.

The latter pointed to the liqueur flask.

"No, that wasn't it," said Krantz with decision.

Baptiste shrugged his shoulders; he could swear to it that he was right. Still, what was the use of arguing with these people?

"It was this," said Krantz, pointing to the Forty-nine Tokay; "my friends would like to try it."

Then it struck Baptiste that Krantz had meant to tell a lie all along, and that for a purpose which was entirely his own concern. It was a pity to waste the good stuff on these vagabonds; but unless they were used to it—and they did not look as if they were—it would either give them an apoplectic stroke, or kill them right out. And there was nothing Baptiste desired more devoutly; his shoulders would be stiff for a fortnight with the butting Ricotte had given them. He looked round quickly; he could venture it, his master was not in the room.

Ricotte gazed critically at the contents of the two glasses—glasses almost the size of beakers—which Baptiste had poured out for him and Fifine; but the placid amber of the beverage betrayed nothing of its insidious strength.

"Looks rather watery," observed Ricotte.

"It's as light as air," said Krantz. "I had two

glasses of it myself. Here you are, Fifine, down with it."

Ricotte held up his glass. "Well, here's death to aristocrats, plutocrats, and all other rats in the world." And with that he tossed it down. Fifine followed suit very much more slowly.

"Well done," laughed Krantz, filling another glass and forcing it to Ricotte's lips; "just one more."

And before Ricotte could gather sufficient sense to protest, the second glass had gone the way of the first, not, however, so precipitately.

"No more," he said, walking away resolutely.

He had only taken a few steps when he found Lepellier coming towards him.

"Would you favour us with your attention for a few moments?" Lepellier was asking. "My friends and I have something to say to you."

"Then say it quickly," replied Ricotte gruffly. "I must get home and to bed. My work starts at four in the morning."

"A hard life—eh, Ricotte?" said Lepellier insinuatingly.

"Not as hard as you deserve," muttered Ricotte between his teeth. Then they joined Botin and the two Delacroix.

"Take a seat," said Botin.

Ricotte would have done so without the invitation; he was feeling a curious uncertainty how to manage his legs.

At that moment Camille re-entered the room. A glow of satisfaction spread over his face: this was even beyond his expectation. To see Ricotte sitting so peaceably among the objects of his hatred, listening

with an air of appreciative quietness to their talk—it was a miracle. The wolf was couching with the lambs. He was getting a little more confident about the outcome of his scheme.

“And now for Fifine,” he thought to himself.

Krantz had left her to get within hearing distance of the men, and there she stood all alone, staring at the two ladies with a glance which Camille thought quaintly naïve, and which a less prejudiced observer would have called uncommonly rude. Camille wondered he had not yet noticed that evening how gloriously beautiful she looked. In the few minutes of his absence, her eyes seemed to have doubled their brilliance and a flush had come into her cheeks, and a carmine into her lips that would bear comparison with the most delicate tintings of the sunset. It required all his self-control to keep him from rushing forward to her and catching her madly in his arms. What did he care? Let the whole world, let Heaven and earth, living and dead, know of the love he bore her!

“Look at your father over there,” he said with a glad smile; “he is getting quite friends with his hated monopolists.”

“Yes, he is getting quite friends with his hated mon—mon—monopolists,” she repeated mechanically, her tongue dragging on the last word.

Camille looked at her curiously. He had not noticed the habit in her before.

“I should not be surprised if his opinion of them were to improve on closer acquaintance.”

“Should improve on c—closer acquaintance,” she stammered.

Camille stood dumbfounded. Great God! What was coming over her? The flush in her cheeks was turning to flaming crimson, the bright sparkle in her eyes became a glassy glitter, and the strange stare wherewith she fixed them on him gripped his heart in nameless terror. Was she going mad? What was the cause of that odd grimace which convulsed her features almost out of recognition? Suddenly a peal of laughter broke from her—a meaningless, mechanical sound, and the next moment she staggered forward, stiffly, rigidly, her arms outstretched as if to keep her balance; and then her limbs seemed to relax, to become springy and elastic, and presently she was bounding through the chamber like a Bacchante of old; her hair straggling from its coils, and hanging loose about her shoulders in a golden veil. And then her lips moved, at first idly, inarticulately, until they had taken hold of their utterance, and voiced it discordantly—that old, terrible echo from the great Reign of Terror:

*“Ca ira, ça ira,  
Les aristocrats à la lanterne.”*

And almost at the same time, a roar like that of a wounded lion resounded through the room. Ricotte had started up from his chair, had caught it up by the leg, and was brandishing it through the air as he thundered:

“What! you want to buy me over? You want to give me gold and make me the tool of your God-forsaken machinations? You want me to be your whip-carrier, you cursed slave-drivers? You dare ask me to desert the cause for which I have worked

and suffered all the days of my life, and serve your miserable ends? Ah, you don't know me yet! All I have done hitherto has been only child's play. I never before had so strong a motive. I hated you only for the wrongs you had done my brothers and my sisters; now I can hate and persecute you for my own sake. You have offered me insult—deadly, mortal insult—you shall see how I avenge my honour. Curses on you—curses . . .”

His utterance died away to a confused mumbling; the chair dropped out of his hands, and he tottered back, his eyes bloodshot, his chest heaving, muttering to himself, and laughing hysterically. Lepellier and the others had shrunk back, pale and trembling, into a window-niche; the ladies had rushed out of the room and stood shrieking for help midway on the staircase, and the servants came trooping up in terror-stricken wonder. Krantz had caught hold of Fifine, and now she lay on his bosom, her arms clasp<sup>ing</sup> his neck, her whole body panting and shaken by convulsive weeping. He dragged her up to Ricotte, and gripped him by the arm.

“Come along,” he said roughly; “they will send for the police and throw you into prison. Come!”

Trembling in every limb, Ricotte followed him like a whipped cur. So they went staggering down the staircase and out at the open hall-door. Krantz was cursing himself under his breath. All that he had intended, and all he thought necessary to his purpose was to befog father and daughter, to envelope their powers of perception in a cloud, through which the memory of this evening would loom but hazily, in a chaos and confusion of detail,

with a blurred, misty retrospect wherein nothing could be located. There would be no further need of precaution on that head; this was the last, as it was the first, time they were visiting this house—Ricotte had assured him of that. But, by all the demons of hell, it was through no fault of his that this time his precautions had been nearly too thorough-going.

The other guests had long hurried away; the servants had come in several times to turn out the lights, and still Camille was standing, dumb and rigid, as he had stood at the moment when Fifine had broken away from him. At last Baptiste tapped him on the shoulder; that recalled him to life. He tottered into his room, locked the door, and with a low cry of agony, threw himself, face downward, on the ground.



CHAPTER  
SIXTEENTH

*A DUEL WITH  
PROVIDENCE*

THROUGH the window the grey dawn came stealing in, still and ghostlike. The gaslight looked wan and garish, and the frightened shadows were scurrying from corner to corner, knowing that soon the first streaks of the sun would come, like a busy housewife's besom, to sweep away the rubbish and garbage of the night. But the growing light bore no hope, no meaning to Camille's dazed senses. There he sat in the same arm-chair into which he had hurled himself when he felt his limbs give way under him, weak and unstrung with the measureless tramp of his night-vigil, his shoulders bruised and battered by collision with the edges and protuberances of the chamber. And now he had fallen into a waking stupor, which he could not mistake for sleep; something like it a condemned criminal might feel the night before his execution.

He had strange companions in his solitude—monstrous fancies which kept flitting through his brain, nor did he possess sufficient strength of thought to know them for what they were, but they held his mind captive with a terrible sense

and semblance of reality. Among the first was the figure of a woman whose face he knew—a beautiful face, but now it was distorted to the likeness of a lost angel's, and the figure whirled round and round him with its tresses of gold fluttering behind like pennons. And presently one of them touched his cheek, and made him cry out with pain, because they were not human tresses at all, but jets of devouring flame. Then the figure spun on and on, till it multiplied on his vision into countless shapes, all grinning at him, mocking him, stinging his bare breast, and searing his eyes with live scorpions of fire. And then they vanished, and behind them came a great giant brandishing for his club the trunk of a full-grown oak, and in front of him were flying a pack of little men, yelping like curs and bearing upon their backs great pouches that bulged to bursting with their contents of precious metal. But the burden was heavy, and their steps flagged beneath it, so that he came up closer and closer; and by-and-bye he reached the first—round swung the club and the little man lay gasping out his life-breath. The second fared likewise, and the third; and after that it was hard to distinguish anything because the distance was so great, and they ran without stopping till the horizon swallowed up pursuer and fugitives. After that there appeared a ghastly thing—the flesh hung in tatters from its face, the eyes were mildewy and maggot-eaten, and over its dripping garments, that showed the skeleton limbs beneath, worms and slugs and other water-vermin were crawling. And the thing lifted up its long, lank arms that creaked in their sockets, and

became every moment longer and lankier, until they were within an inch of the dreamer's throat. . . .

With a shiver of fear, Camille sprang up and looked round him. It was full daylight. He staggered towards the wall to turn out the gas-flame; as he did so, he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror and quickly put his hands over his face. Surely this was the greatest of the horrors that had passed before him in review—his own countenance, for he knew he would look like that when he lay in his coffin. Even if he had wished to, he could not venture out like that unless he wanted people to point their fingers after him and whisper: "There goes a dead man."

He swallowed a glass of wine, and seated himself again in the arm-chair. Now, at last, it all came back to him—now he could think out clearly all the vague, brain-dizzying suggestions that his mind had tried to grip in vain all during the night. One was not so much afraid to think in the daytime. How had it come about—the terrible fiasco last evening? It had burst on him, like an assassin's stroke from behind an ambush, just as he was about to thank his lucky stars for the first piece of good fortune that had accrued to him from premeditation of his own. Lepellier must have made some stupid blunder. Ricotte was a powder-mine and required delicate handling; beneath the clumsy touch, he had ignited and blasted Camille's hopes beyond mending. Ricotte was on his guard now, and a second attempt to tamper with his convictions would be still more useless and disastrous.

But that was not the thing which lay uppermost

on his mind. His dominant thought was *Fifine*. What was he to make of it? Sweetness, womanliness, chaste reserve—to him she had been the embodiment of these three virtues that had gone to make her the most perfect of her sex. And now she had trampled them all under foot, had disgraced them beyond retrieving, in her reckless, purposeless self-abandonment. How was he ever again to behold in her the wonderful creature he had seen only a few days ago, queenly and dignified in the high mission she had arrogated to herself? It was, indeed, arrogance. She who held the reins of self-command so loosely in her hands—she presumed to hold control over the destiny of others. She would show others how to make their lives fit, while she herself lacked the sense of what was due and worthy? What different construction was he to put on what he had witnessed? A mad, impish freak—it could not be explained otherwise. Baptiste or Krantz could have given him a truer explanation, but it was hardly to their interest to do so, and, moreover, Camille never thought any one could help him to understand this. All he knew was that he ought to hate, spurn, and despise her, as he hated all women who had forgotten what they owed to their sex. And yet he felt, with a terrible sinking at his heart, that the sight he had witnessed had made no abatement in the intensity of his love—nay, it had fanned it, had given it fuel until it was blazing with a fire that consumed his reason, his self-respect. Was the thing on the wall in the other room not right to laugh in its dead, impotent glee? Oh, it was a barbarous punishment, and bitterest thought of all—he had deserved it.

Admitted then—he had deserved it; and what now? Was there no atonement? Surely he had tried hard enough to make reparation; he was faithfully fulfilling the vow he had made in the days when the chances of fulfilment were far-off indeed. Did he not give tithe of his wealth, and that with no niggard hand? Wherever he came across human misery, in whatever shape, he relieved it. How many struggling men of talent had he endowed with means to tide over the time of adversity? The great charity institutions throughout the country appealed to him, and he answered the appeal with princely munificence. And no one knew of it—he did not trumpet it aloud. If for every kind act he felt a moment's respite, it would have been a glorious satisfaction to him. But it availed nothing—he could not bribe his conscience. From morning to night the cry of “murderer” rang in his heart; through all the hours of daylight and darkness the love, that had been made his avenging angel, stabbed, lacerated, crucified him. And if it had lost none of its strength of pain by the disillusion of last night, when, when would it finally take its sting out of his heart?

So what was he to do? Nothing? Sit idle while he was agonising inch by inch? No, he had thought of one means of expiation; it ought to be sufficient, for as a rule men use it only as a last resource. He had taken life: the fact remained; he might quibble about it to others, not to himself. And, therefore, he must offer life in exchange. Not suicide—no; that did not serve his purpose. There was no virtue in sneaking out of the world like a thief—a thief who

would filch his life, and is afraid to let himself know it. Nothing of the hole-and-corner business ; open-eyed, with all his faculties about him, so he wanted to see death face to face, wrestle with the grim shadow, and succumb—not mechanically, as a pitiful matter-of-course ; there must be chance, hazard, jeopardy about it—the infinitesimal chance of escape that multiplies the certainties of death a millionfold. And if he escaped ? well, perhaps the attempt would be accepted as a peace-offering by the mysterious forces that controlled these things. He wished to show them that his repentance was no mere formula of the lip, that he was willing to vindicate it right at the very threshold of eternity. Yet, how was it to be done ? It was a difficult problem he had set himself, one which could scarcely be worked out by ordinary everyday methods, and of which the solution was best left to accident. Well, then, he would press accident into his service.

The whole day had passed in such conflicts of thought and feeling, wherein all the bloodshed is of the soul. He had not stirred out of the room ; the servants had brought him food, had deposited it silently, and had hurried as quickly as they could out of the presence of their taciturn master. An air of gloom hung over the whole household ; everybody spoke only in whispers as though some one lay dead within.

A cry of relief rose from Baptiste, as towards the evening he opened the door for M. Lavoisier.

“I can’t see him now,” answered Camille curtly in reply to the announcement ; “I shall call on him myself to-morrow.”

“Nonsense, I shall save you the trouble,” said the

lawyer, entering of his own accord. He spoke cheerfully, but his face looked troubled.

"I know all about it," he said hurriedly, when Baptiste had left; "I met the two Delacroix and they told me the whole story. So things came very little short of murder in this house last night? I am shocked—overwhelmed."

Camille sat silent, gnawing his lip.

"To think you had any dealings with that firebrand Ricotte," continued Lavoisier. "Why, he is one of the most dangerous persons in the country! I think I can understand now your reluctance to accept your uncle's property; he had, no doubt, imbued you with his pernicious principles."

"You can think whatever you like," said Camille sullenly; "surely I may have the privilege of choosing my own friends."

"But you must exercise a little discretion as to those with whom you bring them into contact," said the lawyer severely; "I am told that Mme. Botin had had a series of fainting fits since yesterday which cause the utmost alarm."

Camille continued biting his lip; he would have heard with as much unconcern the news that Mme. Botin had broken her neck.

Lavoisier regarded him shrewdly.

"There are more reasons than one for which I regret my absence here last night," he continued. "Ricotte brought his daughter; she is very beautiful, the Delacroix say."

He saw Camille wince.

"Not that she behaved herself exactly like a lady; but, then, what can we expect?"

He anticipated the remark would draw Camille, but he still had to wait in vain for an answer.

Then he got up and strode over to him.

"You are a man of mystery, Camille, but answer me this: is Ricotte's daughter the key to your mysteries?"

Camille looked at him wearily. "Don't let us talk about it," he said. "You call me a man of mystery. I am that with a vengeance; I have puzzled even myself. But if I am satisfied to go without an explanation, why should you not be? Do me a favour, Lavoisier—don't let us talk about it."

The lawyer looked at him in affectionate solicitude.

"You are not yourself," he said; "that affair of last night upset you. No wonder, it would have tried a man with nerves of steel. Get your things on and come for a stroll on the boulevards; there's nothing like it to brush the cobwebs out of your brain-box. No, I will take no refusal," he added, as he saw Camille make a gesture of reluctance.

And indeed, Camille was very grateful to him as soon as he had reached the open; the evening air wrapped itself like a dew-soaked bandage round his fevered temples. There was something of the pure breath of heaven still left to breathe. So they passed on to where the life of the city concentrates at night. The lawyer was very talkative; he told Camille of the case wherein he had prosecuted during the day: a noted duellist, who had killed his man almost in sheer sport, and who had managed to lie his way out. Then he spoke of other legal experiences of his, spoke of everything except what might recall last



night's incidents to Camille's memory. Camille saw his drift and appreciated it; he was only sorry that all this amount of good intention should run to waste. Steadily and persistently, beneath his companion's garrulity, flowed the undercurrent of his own thoughts. And there it would continue to flow, he knew full well, till its sources were dammed up, and that meant choking up the very fountains of life.

The throng round them thickened. They' had drifted 'into one of the many tributaries that feed the main torrent, and presently they got into the midst of the whirling eddy.

"We had better anchor a little," said Lavoisier.

Camille assented gladly; he did not feel fight enough in him to battle through all this tumult.

For a few minutes they sat at one of the little tables ranged outside the café, neither of them speaking, the lawyer regarding with keen enjoyment the slow harmonious movement of the shifting panorama; it was an object lesson which he, the student of human nature, appreciated more and more with each repetition. But it jarred on Camille; he only saw so many gaudy silhouettes. The dissolving views and ever varying tints dizzied and distressed him. He bore it as long as he could. "I should prefer to sit inside," he said at last.

"By all means," assented Lavoisier readily. He remembered he had not come out to enjoy himself, but to distract Camille, and therefore he must humour his wishes—though they might be only whims. They chose, that is Lavoisier chose, a table at the rear where they might observe without being observed. It was very quiet there, save when one

of the doors swung open, and an echo of the uproar and stir came wafted in from without. But suddenly they became aware of a loud commotion at the main entrance, which was pushed back so that they could almost hear the glass rattle in its frame. A gang of roystering fellows tumbled in, and after a moment's survey, bore down straight on the table adjoining that occupied by Camille and Lavoisier. A look of annoyance came over the lawyer's face, which deepened into disgust when he saw the leader of the troop. The latter recognised him at the same time, and with an ugly sneer came up close.

"An unexpected pleasure; I did not think to meet you again so soon," he jeered. "You did your best to kill me off to-day, eh, Monsieur Public Prosecutor? But I was a little too slippery for you."

"I only did my duty," said Lavoisier, restraining himself. "I congratulate you on the able defence that procured your acquittal."

Camille had looked up quickly at the sound of the stranger's voice—surely he knew it. It was Piteignac. The man's eyes were turned on him in the same instant, and in the next he had burst into an uproarious laugh.

"Hullo, what on earth are you doing here? Where did you steal those clothes? Who would have thought of *Fin-de-la-queue* trying to masquerade as a gentleman?"

He scanned Camille insolently. Then he turned to his companions and said, raising his voice unnecessarily:

"Come away from here; the neighbourhood is altogether too aristocratic for us. Do you see that fellow whom our amiable Lavoisier has honoured with his acquaintance? Well, he worked under me for two years at the river quarries—I stake my word for it—as a common navvy."

The others scrambled again to their feet; they were all more or less tipsy in honour of Pitoignac getting acquitted, and Pitoignac, as befitted the occasion, was as drunk as all the others put together.

Camille's heart gave a great leap at his words, and then a thrill of joy ran through him. At last fate had been kind to him, and he had found the solution of his problem. It was so simple; Pitoignac was the dreaded duellist of whom Lavoisier had spoken; he never missed his man; Pitoignac had given him ample provocation. Here, here at length was the chance for which he had looked; it fitted his requirements fully and fatally, and therefore he must make sure, quite sure of it. If he let it go he might not meet another in twenty years.

Terribly calm he rose to his height, walked slowly over to where Pitoignac was standing with the besotted grin on his lips, seized him by both ears, and deliberately spat in his face.

A cry of horror burst from the bystanders; Lavoisier fell back half-fainting. The only two who stood unmoved were Camille and Pitoignac.

The latter had become sobered as if by magic. One of his comrades stepped up and offered him his handkerchief.

Roughly he pushed it away. "No, no," he said

shaking his head grimly, "let it stay there ; I only know one way of washing it off. Let it stay there till then."

"I am ready to give you satisfaction whenever you please," said Camille quietly.

Pitoignac made a grimace of vexation. "That is only a gentleman's privilege, and I have just told everybody who and what you were. I should lose caste by killing you."

"If you say that, I shall call you a coward and poltroon," said Camille, with stony indifference. "The past is past ; what I was is no matter. If I cared for it I could buy up all the stone-works in France and make you my servant. I am Camille Clairmont."

Pitoignac knew the name—everybody in Paris did. In the old days Camille had been to him only "Tail-end" or "Number 202."

"That is to say, you will be Camille Clairmont till the day after to-morrow at five minutes past six in the morning. Will it suit you to die by then?"

Camille shrugged his shoulders. "Make your arrangements ; I shall be ready. You will know where to find me."

He threw his card on the table and seated himself again beside M. Lavoisier, as though nothing had happened. Pitoignac snatched it up, and without another word left the café.

It took Lavoisier full two minutes before he found breath to speak. "What in perdition's name tempted you to this foolhardiness?" he gasped.

"Don't you think the temptation was sufficiently obvious?" replied Camille, without a trace of concern.

"But Pitoignac is a deadly marksman, and as the insulted party he has the choice of weapons, and the first shot. Camille you are doomed," groaned the lawyer, wringing his hands.

"I could hardly be expected to think of all these things at the moment, could I?" said Camille, pleasantly. "Above all, don't make a scene; we are conspicuous enough as it is. Come, let us go."

He seized the lawyer by his arm and dragged him into the open.

"What cursed luck made me bring you out to-night?" asked Lavoisier, despairingly.

"I assure you it's a question not worth troubling about," said Camille; "especially as there are more important matters to be settled."

"Ah! of course, you want a second," said Lavoisier quickly. "I am at your service; unless you consider a man of fifty too old for the business."

Camille was taken aback. As a matter of fact he had intended asking the lawyer to act as his second; he had no one else for the office—neither Krantz nor Ricotte would suit the fastidious Pitoignac. But Lavoisier's spontaneous offer made him suspicious. It was strange that the man, who only a few hours ago had exercised his function of Public Prosecutor, should propose to make himself privy to another breach of the law.

The next moment the explanation flashed on him. He stopped to look Lavoisier straight in the face.

"Are you sure you have no underhand motive in your offer?" he asked sharply.

"Dear me—what do you mean?" quavered Lavoisier guiltily.

"By acting as my second you will get to know the spot of assignation, and will arrange measures to prevent the encounter from taking place."

"What put the idea into your head?" was the embarrassed answer.

"Then I am right?" insisted Camille.

"No," said Lavoisier hardily.

"On your word of honour?"

"On my . . ." Then he stopped and looked at the ground.

"Lavoisier, I am in earnest about this affair," said Camille. "You may be my second if you swear to play me no tricks."

They had reached a secluded street. Lavoisier seized Camille's hand with a passionate grasp.

"Don't be obstinate," he said, with tears in his voice. "Let me negotiate an apology. If anything should happen to you, your death will rest on my soul. It was because Pitoignac saw you in my company that he uttered his insult."

"Nonsense. You have no responsibility whatever. I am taking my life into my own hands—that is all."

"But I think it could be arranged," persisted the lawyer. "Pitoignac is not a rich man; he has given up his overseership, and is living by his wits. A few thousand . . ."

"I forgive you, Lavoisier," interrupted Camille, speaking very kindly. "If any other man but you had made the suggestion to me, it would have been another case for seconds. Don't attempt to dis-

suade me. Once for all ; I am determined on the duel."

Lavoisier walked sadly by his side. "Well, then, I swear," he said at length. He thought that by acting as second it would at least be in his power to insist on the easiest conditions possible.

"As far as I understood, Pitoignac is going to fix the day after to-morrow, so we have no time to lose in settling your affairs in case of an accident."

Lavoisier's voice trembled as he spoke ; he knew his "accident" was a euphemism. To his mind there was no doubt as to the issue.

They parted outside the lawyer's house. He wrung Camille's hand fervently, and then stood at the door watching him walk away. He was amazed ; the young man's step was not like that of one who, in all human probability, had less than forty-eight hours of life left to him. Sadly shaking his head, he entered. For the first time in his existence he realised his own littleness by the light of the infinite variety of man's nature. To him Camille Clairmont was a species, and, moreover, the only specimen it contained.

Meanwhile Camille walked on at a swinging pace. His heart beat high, with a strange sense of airiness, of elastic buoyancy, like that of a man who has rid himself of a difficult and burdensome business to his own satisfaction. Why, indeed, should he feel downcast ? His past he was done with ; the present was only his on trust, so to speak, and would soon be surrendered ; his future—well that might take care of itself. Just now he was living within a circumscribed orbit of time, complete in itself, and having

no forward-look, no retrospect. This then, perhaps, was the grand secret of happiness, to live in the moment, to write *Carpe diem* on one's flag of life, to make it one's battle-cry in the great scrimmage for survival. Oh, if he had only mastered the philosophy before, if he could have narrowed and compressed himself into a groove, on either side of which the events of life might run infinitely, indefinitely, without touching him, if he had been merely intent on following the mechanical instinct that prompted him to live without caring or daring to examine the delicate springs that made up life's mechanism. He knew not how it was these thoughts should come to him now, now that it was too late to make new plans or be dissatisfied with the old. Perhaps they had been provoked by his unexpected meeting with Pitoignac, the very man who had once frightened him into the fear of becoming an animated machine. And again he thanked his destiny, with a feeling of pride and self-approval, that it had never been his lot to pass through the world, even for a day's stage, paralysed in his emotions; that he had felt the stirring of conscience, the sugared bitterness of love, the throes of suffering; that he had always been quick to the touch of life; that the chords of his soul had ever vibrated readily to its pulse, even if it was only with a jarring, aching discord.

He turned a corner, and suddenly a blaze of light burst on his vision. He was standing before a notorious house of amusement; he saw the laughing, chatting groups pass in and out—gaudy, brazen-faced women, dissolute-looking men,



and over the whole there hung a fantastic air of nonchalance, of abandonment and acquiescence. A curious fascination held him rooted to the spot. Many a time before had he seen the place flaunt itself thus in his eyes, stretching forth its meretricious blandishments, and each time he had hurried past with the haste with which one flees from a house of lepers. What held him there? "Seize the moment"—had he not just wished to make it his motto? Why should he not seize it? He placed one foot on the entrance, saw a bold painted face lifted to his in impudent innuendo, and turned in flight with a half-choked cry of loathing. Though his life might belong to him now only provisionally, though he was already exempt from all responsibility to himself, had he the right to cast himself loose? There was still someone to whom he owed a blush, someone he dared not face unless he felt himself pure and unsullied. To-morrow, for the last, last time no doubt, he would put himself once more on the rack—to-morrow he would see Fifine again. True, she had fallen from her pedestal, but she was still his divinity; and if she had descended nearer to earth, well, he would only have to crouch lower at her feet and the more humbly adore her. It was his penance, he must fulfil it. That night, for the first time since many nights, he found the voice of prayer, and prayed that his sacrifice might be found acceptable, and that, if the issue were other than he expected it to be, he might at last be guided unerringly and mercifully into the straight road to atonement.

Next morning he was up in good time. It might be his last day, and he wanted to make

it a long one. About nine, Pitoignac's second called. Camille sent him M. Lavoisier's address down through Baptiste. An hour later, the lawyer himself came, looking sad and perturbed.

"Pitoignac is unmanageable," were his first words; "he is determined on murdering you. His conditions were three shots at fifteen yards. With the utmost difficulty, I brought him down to two at twenty, although I don't think there is anything gained even by that."

"Don't croak, you bird of ill omen," said Camille, cheerfully. "Why don't you make up your mind to my getting killed, and take it calmly? There, sit down, and we can settle whatever little business there is to settle. I am not the first dying man whom you have helped in making his testament."

"Camille, I entreat you—absolve me from my oath," cried Lavoisier, with difficulty keeping his tears back.

"What is the use of re-opening the discussion?" said Camille hastily. "There, let that be the last word on the matter."

"Pitoignac's revolver will say the last word on it," murmured Lavoisier. Broken-hearted and unnerved, he settled down to his task. They worked till mid-day, and then Camille became impatient.

"Haven't we done enough for the present?" he said. "I think you can finish the rest without me."

"Why, what are you going to do?"

"Pay a farewell visit."

The lawyer sighed. "I had hoped we would at least spend the whole day together," he said. "Shall you be gone long?"

"I can't say ; perhaps the whole afternoon."

"Is it the Ricotte people?" asked Lavoisier.

Camille nodded assent.

"Then I shall come with you."

"That you shall not," said Camille, gently, yet firmly. "Let me for once exercise the right of employer, which you requested me to take over at the beginning of our acquaintance," he continued, with a smile. "I shall require the deeds to be finished by four this afternoon."

Without waiting for a reply, he left the room, put on his hat, and quickly made his way in the direction of Ricotte's house. He had planned it all out carefully. He would go early, and if Fifine was not at home, he would loiter about the house till her return. As it was, he met her just as she was coming out from the front-door.

"Whither away?" he asked almost gaily, heartened and elated by his good fortune.

"I was going into the woods, a quarter of an hour's way from here," she said, blushing, and casting down her eyes. Of course, he had come to reproach her for disgracing him before all those people.

Camille noted her embarrassment, without giving a thought to it; there was no time to think now—only to speak and to be done with everything.

"I have something to say to you ; may I accompany you?" he asked. She walked on, and he, taking the hint, fell into step. "I have come to say goodbye," he told her, as soon as they had turned into one of the by-paths approaching the forest. "I am going on a journey."

"When are you coming back?" she asked quickly.

"Soon, or not at all."

"You are capricious," she said, very busy with the nosegay at her throat.

"No, my return does not depend on me."

"Why? are you not your own master?"

"Not in the present case."

They had reached the outskirts of the forest, and were treading very cautiously among the gnarled roots and tangled undergrowth, and that made talk very difficult. The silence followed them till they had well penetrated into the thick of the trees. Fifine was strangely moved. Her embarrassment at Camille's expected upbraidings continued; and yet, here he had been half-an-hour in her company, and not with a syllable had he referred to it; nay, it was as though he had no knowledge of the thing. She was puzzled, until her perplexity took to itself a tinge of anger. She felt humiliated by what he no doubt considered his magnanimous silence. She would rather be scolded, and so have a chance of extenuating her wrong by owning to it.

"I am sorry I did it," she burst out impulsively.

"Did what?" he asked, not catching her drift.

"The other night—at your house, you know," she explained vaguely.

He stopped to look at her. "Do you think anything you do makes any difference to me?" he asked. "And, therefore, why should you not have done what you did as soon as any other thing?"

For a moment she was nonplussed by the ambiguity of the answer; then she looked into his eyes and knew that he meant one thing, and one thing only—humble, unquestioning devotion. She wanted to hear him say it; she was a woman.

“What makes you so forbearing?” she asked.

“My love for you.”

Then her resolution came back to her. “It cannot be love,” she answered sternly, shaking her head. “I don’t know what love is; I sometimes think I shall never know; but it cannot be anything so mechanical, so matter-of-course, so monotonous. It must shift and change, or else it cannot live.”

Her words came upon him stunningly; was she a prophetess? Who had told her that this love of his was somehow not of his or her making, that it was engendered—by some power of heaven or otherwise—and that it was all of one hue and form, because it was not in his control to diversify it with the thousand subtler tints and aspects that are the attributes of living love? Who—what had told her? At any other time he would have asked her; but now it did not matter—nothing mattered. The blood of spring was effervescing all around; its delight was intoxicating him. Here he was walking with the woman that was the one woman on earth to him, and to-morrow at this time he would in all likelihood be dead. Was a man to ask questions at such a time? He could only feel it all, feel it helplessly with a dumb impotence of voicing his feelings.

“When do you start?” she asked, frightened by the look on his face from pursuing the subject.

“To-morrow morning early,” he replied.

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know my destination; I shall probably go to explore territory unknown to me."

"Is that not rather dangerous?" she asked, anxiously.

"Not in this instance. I am by no means the first to explore it; a good many have preceded me there, and I expect by now the country is tolerably civilised."

She gave a little sigh of relief.

"You are pleased?" he asked. "Is it at my going?"

"No, at the lessened risk," she replied; "there will be more chance of your returning."

"Do you think of that?"

"I do."

"And desire it?"

"Assuredly," she said quickly, looking at him frankly; "one does not like losing old—friends." She chose the word after a moment's deliberation; she was not sure if she ought not to have said "acquaintances."

He thought he must be half-dead already, for her utterance gave him no pleasure. Two days ago it would have sent him frantic. "Old friends;" that meant making headway.

"Why do you go?" she resumed. They had turned and were sauntering back.

"I made a bad mistake some time ago, and now I am trying to correct it."

"That's strange," she said, puzzled. "You want to make good a mistake of yours, and therefore you are going to a place where you have never been before."

"It's very simple," he replied. "I am going there where I know I shall find the one to whom I have done the wrong, and to whom I must make reparation. Don't you approve of it?"

"Assuredly," was her quick reply. She was thinking of her own misdemeanour and her own desire to make amends. "Own up to your fault, and be done with it once for all. It makes you feel wonderfully good friends with yourself."

He was satisfied; her words were to him an omen he had sought; he had wanted to hear from her lips that he was right in seeking death; it made no difference that he had tricked her into the admission.

They became very silent. Camille was counting each step they took—each one seemed sending them a mile asunder, because it brought them nearer to the goal of parting. Fifine was thinking of the pity for him that filled every nook and corner of her heart. It was a different pity to what she had felt the evening Ricotte had brought him home; it was not veined with hatred. She tried to repress it; she wished to spare a strong man the silent indignity of meeting with a weak girl's commiseration. And, therefore, she hardened herself.

"I suppose we must say good-bye?" he asked irresolutely when they had again reached the house.

"You might stay a little," she said.

"I have no time." Why prolong the racking?  
"Give my regards to your father and Krantz."

Their hands were clasped for a moment, then he tore himself away.

"God's speed," she cried after him.

He laughed as he hurried on: God's speed on the

devil's road ! Well, perhaps, even there a good wish might not come amiss. At the corner he turned round and saw a white handkerchief waving to him out of the window. His heart became hard and cold. It was all over now. The world was Fifine, and so he had said good-bye to the world.

Lavoisier was awaiting him with impatience.

"Here you are at last. I thought you were never coming back," he said pettishly as Camille walked in.

"Have I missed anything?" asked the latter.

"No, but if you don't spend a little time on polishing up your shot-practice, you might miss Pitoignac to-morrow—that is if he does not kill you straight off. It must be nearly a year since you handled a fire-arm."

"I don't see any use in practising," said Camille.

"Why not? It's the only precaution you can take to disable him from the second trial. He never misses twice."

"I don't intend aiming at him," said Camille nonchalantly.

Lavoisier gasped for breath. "Then you have absolutely made up your madman's mind to be killed? Perhaps you think he will be equally generous! He will riddle you if he has the chance."

Camille made a gesture of indifference.

"Let the thing take its course; I am determined not to stain my hands in guilt." He shuddered as he spoke; if by any accident he killed Pitoignac, he would have two human lives on his soul. He had quite enough of being a murderer once.

"Camille," said Lavoisier solemnly, "there is something supernatural about you. You are an elemental



enigma. The first time I set eyes on you, you signalised the event by refusing a gigantic fortune as dispassionately as one refuses a peppermint. Our acquaintance ends, or will end, by your gratuitously throwing your life away. Is there a curse on you?"

Camille stood pensive. So people were beginning to find him out; it was time for him to die.

"You don't know everything," he replied at last.

"What is there to know?" flared up Lavoisier. "Why do you shroud yourself in mystery? You come here a mere boy; you work for your living like anybody else in your circumstances; you serve your army term like every other able-bodied citizen—that is your life's history. What else is there I should know? Come, what have you to say?"

"That it is nearly time for dinner," replied Camille, looking at his watch; "don't spoil my appetite—remember I may not eat another dinner for a whole eternity."

The evening dragged on wearily; the two men sat smoking. Lavoisier did most of the talking, chiefly on matters of business. Camille's composure had inveigled him into a counterfeit calmness. At ten o'clock the lawyer got up from his seat.

"You had better go to bed, Camille," he said; "perhaps you will be able to sleep some common sense into yourself."

Camille smiled. "I sleep too sound for anything to interfere with my fixed notions," he replied, holding out his hand; "however, I shall defer to your wishes, if only to set you an example. You have a hard day behind you."

"And a harder one in store," said Lavoisier half audibly.

The two stood looking at each other for a little while, Camille's face like a rock. The lawyer turned away suddenly; he felt himself giving way.

"Happy dreams under my roof, Lavoisier," cried Camille cheerily. Lavoisier was to sleep in the house so as to be at hand in the morning.

"Wake me at half-past four," Camille said to Baptiste; "and see that the carriage is ready."

Five o'clock would have been ample time, but Camille wanted to see the sun rise once more. He had often thought in his boyhood, as through the little cottage window he watched it expand streak by streak, glory by glory, how beautiful it would be to die just as it reached its full golden splendour, to feel one's soul wafted towards its benign radiance, and with the last glance of the death-darkened eyes to see it change into a glittering beam; it would be so comforting to know one did not die altogether in vain. Well, as it was, his death would not be futile; it would balance, at least, the scales of human and divine justice which he had thrown out of equilibrium.

But his wish was not to be granted. When he awoke and looked at the sky he found it dim and sullen, cloud-covered, with only small interstices of murky blue. There would be no sun that morning. But he quickly overcame his disappointment. It was only in keeping with the rest of his life; it had passed in gloom, it would end in gloom. It was useless to quarrel. Slowly he dressed. He was considering if it would be worth his while to pity himself. He had never done so before—surely it was too late to

begin now. It would be thriftless to make all these years of stubborn endurance inconsistent by the side of a single hour, and that the most useless of his life.

And so when Lavoisier entered his room, Camille was humming a tune. The lawyer was shocked.

"You might take things a little more seriously," he said.

"Don't you like 'gallows-humour'?" smiled Camille. He had learned the phrase from Krantz, who, as Alsatian, spoke German; at the time he did not think he would ever illustrate it by any experience of his own.

"I have never seen a man go to his death more cheerfully," said Lavoisier, made almost brutal by the sense of his helplessness.

"The result of living sadly," replied Camille. "There's a moral for you."

The lawyer sat down, burying his face in his hands. Camille went on in a leisurely manner with his toilette. There was no great need to hurry; it lacked half-an-hour to the appointed time, and the place of assignation was only ten minutes distance.

"Have you breakfasted, Lavoisier?" asked Camille.

The lawyer shook his head and shuddered. "It would choke me," he said.

"Well," said Camille, "I don't feel inclined for any either."

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed Lavoisier; "it is the first human touch I have noticed about you. If I had seen you sit down and eat, I should have gone mad."

Camille smiled. "Then let us make a move," he said.

"We shall get there too early, and it won't do me—us any good to tramp about the wet grass," said Lavoisier.

"We can stroll on slowly," suggested Camille.

"And the carriage?"

"You mean the hearse—it can keep pace with us."

Then they went. Baptiste was at the door looking anxious and mystified.

"M. Lavoisier will be coming back shortly," said Camille; "see that you have a glass of something warm ready for him."

They walked down the steps of the front-door. At the bottom Camille turned round, and his glance swept the mansion from basement to gable.

"It will make a fine hospital, won't it? Let it be one for consumptives by preference; my father died of consumption, you know."

Then with a shoulder-shrug, he turned his back on it, and took Lavoisier's arm. The lawyer groaned and was silent.

A sharp gust of wind came whistling about their ears. Lavoisier looked at the sky. "There will be a storm," he said.

"Nature is paying me a compliment," said Camille; "the elements will play my funeral march."

More and more threatening became the scowling expanse overhead. The interstices of blue had become filled in, and along the joinings ran great seams of blackness.

"It is the frown of God on this morning's doings," said Lavoisier piously.

"It will hold over another half-an-hour, I think,"

said Camille, looking up critically ; "the wind is very strong."

He felt quite indifferent ; storm and calm, rain and sunshine—he was leaving them all behind. He had riches enough, but he had never realised what it was to be rich till now ; he was leaving the universe in heritage to his fellow-men. Why should he not think that the wrangling, bickering, and throat-cutting that would go on and continue after him was only for each one to get his proper share in the partition ? The quaint conceit tickled him : the only real men of wealth on earth are the dying.

The carriage was ordered to halt at the outskirts of the thicket. The two men made their way to the edge of the little pond, which was the spot chosen for the encounter. Through the tangle, they saw that the other side had forestalled them.

"Pitoignac does not want to lose time," said Camille, with a curious harshness in his voice ; "and remember, Lavoisier, not a word about amicable arrangements, or anything of that sort."

Lavoisier assented with a nod. In any case, he saw it would only be an unnecessary humiliation ; the vindictive scowl on Pitoignac's face told him that very clearly.

It was five minutes to six ; the doctor had also just arrived. After a stiff salute, the two seconds at once started the final preparations. The weapons were examined to the satisfaction of both, and then the distance was measured off. It was so dark that the numbers on the tape-line could only be distinguished with difficulty. A long drawn out volley of thunder swept the sky right over their heads.

The trees bent creaking as though in pain; the tempest seemed to hang thick and heavy right over the spot where the group of men had taken their stand.

"Don't you think it would be better to wait till the storm has passed?" asked Pitoignac's second of him, under his breath. "There's scarcely light enough to see beyond the length of the barrel."

"Don't trouble. I can see him very well," was Pitoignac's reply. "You forget I have sworn to kill him by five minutes past six—and I will, light or no light."

"It's not the first man you have killed in the dark—is that what you mean?" laughed the second.

"Don't waste time with your stupid jokes," growled Pitoignac; "the storm is just what we want. The rain will wash away all traces, and prevent troublesome inquiries."

"There's a good deal in that," replied the other; and then he continued, turning to Lavoisier, who stood watching Camille, agape at the nonchalant manner in which he was examining his weapon, "We can begin now, gentlemen."

With one hand pressed tightly to his heart, Lavoisier showed Camille into position.

"I had never dreamt of doing you a service of this sort," he said with a shaking voice. "I feel like a hangman."

"And yet it is, perhaps, the best you have done me," said Camille solemnly; "good-bye, old friend—thanks for your many kindnesses."

Overcome by his feelings, the lawyer strained him to his bosom.

"Stand away!" sang out Pitoignac's second. It was four minutes past six; he did not wish his friend Pitoignac to break his word.

Pitoignac took aim. Camille drew himself up full height. Pitoignac could not possibly miss him unless he shot wide purposely, and that was an absurd supposition.

"Fire!" rang out the word.

No report followed; there was only a blinding flash—a long, gleaming javelin of flame came hustling through the air and whizzed into the turf, leaving a gaping rent, ragged and blackened at the edges. In its wake there followed a roar, a deafening avalanche of sound that seemed to tear away the firmament in great patches of lurid sky, and to scatter it in fragments upon the earth. For a moment the world seemed dark and doomed, but when Lavoisier and the others felt the dazzling film of blindness draw off from their sight, they saw Pitoignac standing stark and upright, his right arm limp at his side, his hand empty; with great, vacant eyes, that were the eyes of embodied terror, he was staring at the ground before him, where the pistol lay battered, bent, and twisted out of all shape and semblance. Then suddenly he fell back, without a sound, and with a curious stiffness in his fall.

"He will not fight any more duels," said the doctor softly to Lavoisier; "the lightning was too good a marksman for him."

"Come," said the lawyer, turning to Camille and looking at him with a frightened glance.

"Come," he said again, for Camille stood gaping at the blackened crevice before him, as though his gaze

were following the lightning flash into the very bowels of the earth. At the sound of Lavoisier's bidding he tottered forward.

"I am coming—take me away—quickly," he whispered voicelessly.

The lawyer seized him with a firm grip. "This is the first time I have seen the hand of God reach out of the heavens and smite injustice with the weapon of His wrath," he muttered to himself piously.

And he walked bareheaded through the pelting rain to the carriage.



## CHAPTER SEVENTEENTH

## *LEVELLING BARRIERS*

“SO you give me your word of honour that this will not occur again?” asked Lavoisier of Camille.

“I do,” replied the latter, and no one could doubt the sincerity of his promise.

“A man who has such great issues depending on him must not throw his life into a ditch,” continued Lavoisier; “and now, good-bye; you have wasted two precious days for me. A dozen men like you could bring the machinery that makes the world go round to a dead stand.”

And smiling at his own good-humoured reproach, the lawyer took his departure.

It was the afternoon of the duel; ever since they had re-entered the house, the two men had been discussing the strange events of the morning—that is, Lavoisier had done the talking, and Camille the listening. It was all he felt himself fit for. The miracle of his escape had shaken him to his uttermost depths, and had left him stunned and dazed. For a long time he could not determine whom it was the lightning had stricken—him or Pitoignac, or both. He had longed for a moment’s solitude to re-gather his faculties. But with mistaken kindness

Lavoisier had kept him company, half afraid to leave him alone in his shattered condition, had talked of the matter in all its length and breadth, till his voice came only with a confused hum on Camille's ears. One point alone he did not touch upon, and that Camille knew must be left for his communings with himself. What was all the rest compared to this one thing that had been left unspoken—unsuspected?

And now that he was alone at last, he started settling his accounts, with himself for auditor and voucher. And what he must base all his reckonings on was the simple fact that he was still alive to reckon. Clearly, then, the sacrifice he had been willing to offer had not been accepted of him—had not been required. What to others might be a rare coincidence, something that happened once in a thousand years, was to him, in the present juncture of affairs, the finger of Providence, tracing for him his mandate of life in letters of fire with unerring clearness. "Live on!" it said. "This is not the way to work out your redemption."

And that was why he could afford to affirm his promise to Lavoisier with a light heart. In the moment that he had seen Pitoignac's pistol levelled at him, he had realised with agonising vividness how dear life was, and he had prayed that death might come quickly and take away this deadly fear of death. No, he could not face it again, and he did not feel ashamed of his cowardice at the thought. "This is not the way!" He shuddered. There was only one other, and that had appeared to him so terrible that his very life had seemed of lesser value by comparison. One other way—to give up his wealth.

He asked himself why it was that his wealth had grown upon him so, that it had become so vital, so omnipotent an element in his life. And almost in the same breath he found the answer to his question: the bitter irony of his fate. When he was given cause enough to forget the pain of the renunciation in the joy of the motive, when he could have renounced at Fifine's bidding, then—blind fool he was—he had demurred, had sought subterfuges that availed him nothing. For now he would abandon it of his own accord, with sober, sullen consciousness of purpose, and an inevitable necessity of which before he might have made a virtue.

Well, it was not the first mistake he had committed; his whole life hitherto seemed to have been an error of judgment—one long solecism. But this time he would be right. He would cast from him, with one supreme effort, the glittering dross which had been saddled on him as the burden of his guilt, as the ever-loud monitor of his damnable misdeed. This time he would rid himself of it, once for all. True, it would be hard to return to the old *regime*, to a Mme. Fluquette, or a Touchepas; but surely he had not lost the art of toiling for his livelihood. He had been drilled in it sufficiently to keep it for a lifetime; and one does not forget so easily what one has learnt in suffering.

Somehow, he felt little doubt as to the effect of his renunciation; there seemed to be no room for more disappointments in his life. To be afraid to die—to lose his wealth—not to gain Fifine, that was a contingency before which even the malevolence of his destiny must make pause. He must win Fifine; he

saw in her the panacea for all his ills, for all the heart-pangs wherein his conscience had disguised itself. Of course, he had no guarantee of her ; so far, she had eluded him. He could point to no utterance, no action of hers which he could make the staple of his hopes. And yet that disconcerted him but little. What else was he to expect? Was she not right in refusing to treat with him before, as she looked at it, he had redeemed his honour? What would she think if she knew it was something else besides his honour that needed redemption? And, therefore, he ought to hesitate no longer ; but now that he was bringing things to the very edge of the hazard, he must be prudent, must omit nothing that would further his chances of success by a nail-breadth. And he could do much more than that ; he could join to himself a very powerful ally. He thrilled with joy at the happy thought : what could Krantz not do for him. What would he not do for him? He need only be told, and then his share of the battle could be left safely in his hands.

Quickened by the eagerness of his resolve, Camille set out for the great leather factory where he knew Krantz was employed. It was near seven now, and soon after the time he reached the place the workmen were beginning to leave. Krantz was among the last to issue. An embarrassed look flitted over his face as he saw Camille bearing straight down on him. He thought Baptiste had told his master of the share he had had in the turn things had taken the other night. But Camille's cordial grip of hand convinced him in an instant there was nothing to fear on that head.

"You told Fifine you were starting on a voyage," said Krantz.

"I also told her I might return very soon," replied Camille; "and, as you see, I have returned. Are you going home now?"

"Yes," said Krantz; "but there's no hurry. I have time for a little talk. What brings you here, of all places?"

It was practically the first occasion that he was alone with Camille since his return, and he was curious what sort of a man his marvellous change of fortune had made him.

"I came purposely to see you," said Camille. "We are drifting apart, we are becoming strangers to one another, and I don't think that ought to be. Come in here."

Krantz followed him in silence into the cabaret where Camille led the way; they sat down in the furthest corner, and were served.

"Here's to the renewal of our good comradeship," said Camille. Krantz honoured the toast, but without echoing the sentiment. Camille looked at him, waiting for him to speak.

"Comradeship!" said Krantz, breaking the pause. "How can there be anything of the kind between us two? What have we in common?"

"The memory of the old days when you gave me your truss of straw to sleep on," replied Camille quickly; "we have always been friends, Krantz—good, faithful friends—have we not?"

Krantz winced. If Camille only knew; but he did not know.

"You may have thought me ungrateful. I have made you no return," resumed Camille.

"What return could you have made me?" asked Krantz.

"I knew Ricotte's influence was too strong on you; I knew you would never run counter to his feelings in the matter—else I should have offered to give you all you were willing to take of my abundance. But remember, Krantz, what is mine is yours."

Krantz thought hard: what was the meaning of all this? Surely there must be some trick in it. Camille was tempting him, and if he yielded, no doubt Ricotte would be told of it. Camille wanted to serve some purpose of his own thereby—but what a stupid fellow he was; what a clumsy way of offering a bribe!

"Ricotte or no Ricotte," said Krantz, affecting an extreme indifference, "I should not take anything. You see, I have got into a groove, and I am too lazy to adapt myself readily to another change of life."

The excuse sounded hollow in his own ears, but it was the best that struck him. Could he tell Camille what it was that bound him to the Ricottes?

"Are you so happy in your vocation?" demanded Camille. Something in his tone made Krantz pause before he answered.

"What makes you ask?" he inquired in turn.

Camille laughed awkwardly. "I want to know how it feels to put one's shoulder to the wheel after eating the bread of idleness."

Krantz half rose from his seat, with a dark flush on his face. "Just now you spoke of being good comrades," he said; "and now you taunt me with the past."

"I thought you would know me better than to suppose that," said Camille earnestly; "my words have a deep meaning for me."

"And that is?" asked Krantz more quietly.

"One of these days—it may be soon, very soon—I shall again put on my calico blouse, and start fighting my way with the best and worst of you. I have nearly forgotten what it feels like, and I wanted you to tell me."

Krantz looked at him blankly.

Camille smiled. "You don't believe me? You shall see, Krantz, what good comrades we shall yet be—nay, better than that, fellow-toilers, tramping shoulder to shoulder in the great labour-march." He was growing enthusiastic, whether falsely or of conviction he could hardly tell himself.

Krantz gaped wider and wider. "You are talking wildly; you are throwing your words about at random, and expect me to make head and tail of them," he said.

"I assure you I mean what I say," continued Camille, a little impatiently.

"I see; you are going to take to it as a hobby," replied Krantz vaguely.

"Who said as a hobby? No; in real, living earnest."

"Are you not old Clairmont's heir?"

"Supposing I am?"

"People say he left fifty million francs; are you afraid that will not be enough to live on? Well, then, with a lucrative trade, like mine say, you might earn five francs a day in addition."

"I am going to live on those five francs a day," said Camille.

"And what is to become of the millions?"

"That is not my concern. M. Lavoisier, old Clairmont's lawyer, might perhaps find one or two deserving institutions in the country that can do with a little support."

"But why do you resign them?"

The simple question staggered Camille. For the first time it struck him that people would seek for the motive of his action, and laugh him to scorn for it. Let them seek, let them laugh—he would laugh with them. But Krantz required telling.

"Do you remember a conversation we two had a few days before I fell ill?" he asked.

Krantz pretended to look forgetful, but a quick pang of fear shot through his heart; he knew perfectly well to what Camille referred.

"Do you mean the way Alsatian peasants keep their potatoes from sweetening in winter?" he prevaricated.

"I mean my love for Fifine, which I confided to you then; I confide it to you again to-night."

"Nonsense," said Krantz; "it was a boy's fancy. You have outgrown it."

"It has grown with me; it will never cease growing. Do you see my reason now?"

"I tell you again, you are cheating yourself. You can never marry Fifine. You are called to a different sphere of life, and Fifine can never step over its boundaries."

"And that is why I leave it."

"But you must not—it is criminal; it is against



all laws of nature that a man should make such a sacrifice. Keep your millions, Camille, and marry a princess."

Krantz was getting vehement. He was pleading hard for his own cause. True, he had Ricotte's word that Fifine should be his wife; but until she had confirmed it, he could not count it certain. Bitterly he regretted his false policy in having acceded to Ricotte's postponement.

Camille sat and pondered. "I had thought you would be among the first to encourage my determination," he said slowly. "I had hoped it, because I had reckoned on your assistance."

"What can I do?" asked Krantz.

"You could help me to Ricotte's favour; you can do much with him. As to Fifine, let that be my own task. With her I must have no intermediary. She knows of my love, she will know of my sacrifice. Say, Krantz, shall I not have a strong case to put before him?" And a gleam of joy came into his eyes.

Krantz was biting his fingers in impotent fear. Camille had, indeed, a strong case, much stronger than he. For Camille might flaunt his claim in her face, whereas he himself must keep silent as to his own merits. Long ago it had been agreed upon, and solemnly ratified between him and Ricotte, that the call which Krantz had on her father's gratitude should be kept a secret from Fifine. It was a fad of Ricotte's; he feared it would be a standing reproach to him, if she knew he had been weak enough to let another bear the punishment that was his own. And Krantz had to admit it was just a father should

try to stand unblamed in the eyes of his child. But, all the same, Ricotte's sensitiveness was an unfortunate thing for Krantz, and it maddened him to think that all his manœuvrings, all his carefully planned artifices, should be made null and void. Here he stood again in the same danger which he had taken such trouble to avert. Well, it must be tided over once for all, and at all costs.

He had got up and was collecting his belongings.

"Speak for you to Ricotte? To be sure I will. You will find me a good advocate," he said.

"Thank you, Krantz, with all my heart," said Camille warmly; "if there should come a day when my devotion . . ."

Krantz made a gesture of impatience. "Let it come first," he said; "before then we must settle this little affair."

Outside the tavern he stopped to take leave of Camille.

"But I am going with you. I must see her," said Camille.

"Take my advice and don't," said Krantz; "I have this case in hand and you must defer to me. Leave me a little elbow-room. I intend speaking to Ricotte to-night; it is better for you; you will be out of your suspense the sooner."

"Very well, as you think best," said Camille, swallowing his disappointment; "but I may go to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, and every day after, if you like," said Krantz. By to-morrow Camille would be disposed of. And then Krantz remembered some-

thing he had had in his mind for a very long time—something he wanted to make himself certain about. Here was his opportunity; he might never get another. They had gone on a little way and were standing before a large confectioner's establishment. The brilliant lights of the shop window played on their faces and made each feature stand out distinct as though in broad daylight.

"By the way, Camille," continued Krantz, "that was a curious rumour that went the round of the papers soon after your departure."

"What rumour?" asked Camille unsuspectingly.

"Oh, I forgot," said Krantz in off-hand fashion. "You would not be likely to hear of it where you were—some talk concerning your cousin. It was said there was something back-handed in the way he met his death—foul play, in fact."

His eyes were fixed on Camille's face in merciless scrutiny; he saw its ghastly blanching, he saw the tense lips trying to formulate a sound, and the helpless shaking of head in token of denial. That was enough—he needed no more. He was safe.

"You heard nothing?" he went on with flying breath. "Well, it was just a rumour that lived only for a day or two. Nothing came out at the inquest. Good-night, and be patient—till to-morrow."

Without awaiting a reply he made off for home; but he passed by his lodgings and went straight on to Ricotte's house.

"Is that you, father?" he heard Fifine call from the kitchen, in answer to the creak of the opening door.

Krantz was satisfied; it told him Ricotte was not at home.

"Come off your gridiron there, and entertain your visitor," he cried cheerily.

"Wait a bit, if you please. You aren't of enough consequence to let father's supper burn on your account," she laughed.

"When do you expect him back?"

"I can't say; he hasn't talked much to me these last two days. There seem to be great things brewing at the 'Egalité.'"

"I think so too, though he has been very mysterious about it. But from one or two hints I could gather that some decisive stroke is intended shortly."

Fifine appeared, her face clouded with anxiety. "Do you think there will be any danger?" she asked.

"Who can tell? They are playing with fire, but they know it. Your father can take care of himself."

"I don't know," she said dubiously; "he can take care of others better than himself. His feelings may carry him too far one of these days."

She thought of the scene at Camille's house. Krantz had had a bad quarter of an hour of it, when she brought him to book for having made her drink that terrible wine, and Krantz had wriggled out of it by throwing the blame on that blockhead of a Baptiste. But Ricotte had gloried in the affair. Those scoundrelly monopolists would remember him all their lives. They would know what it was to deal with a man of the people, and would not try again to make a cat's paw of him. It was brave, but it was not prudent to set the enemy on his guard.

"Let us hope the others will keep him in check," she said, responding to her own thoughts.

"You can be sure of that," said Krantz; "they have as much to lose as he." And then he thought it time to come to the subject nearest his heart and tongue. "By the way, I have news for you. I saw Camille to-day."

"What!—back already?" she exclaimed in surprise.

"My opinion is he never started—unless it was for a day's trip into the country. We talked about you."

Carefully he scrutinised her face, but not a muscle could he see moving there.

"What were you saying—things good, things bad?" she asked quietly.

"You have been keeping your secret well," said Krantz inconsequently.

"What secret? If it was my own, I suppose I had a right to keep it."

Krantz's eyes drooped before her steady gaze.

"That he loved you; you might have told your father, and me, your oldest friend," he said almost sullenly, ignoring her rebuke.

"And because I did not, you think I made a mystery of it? I saw no reason to burden others with my affairs; least of all is it your place to take me to task for it."

Krantz bit his lip; one thing he saw clearly: he must not tell her now why it was his place to take her to task. She was in a rebellious mood, and by a rash word all might be lost.

"I have no desire but to see you please yourself," he said smoothly; "only be open with me—trust to my friendship."

"I have nothing to confess," she said simply; "I have not given the matter any thought. You must know, as well as he does, that the difference in our stations is an insurmountable barrier between us."

"The only barrier?" asked Krantz quickly.

"It is as good as a thousand," she answered.

"And suppose the barrier is removed?" continued Krantz.

"That will never be—who would expect it?"

"I do not expect it; I am certain of it," said Krantz vehemently.

She smiled incredulously; had she not tested Camille before?

"Listen, Fifine," said Krantz, his voice trembling with agitation—now or never he must hoist his rival from the saddle—"he told me, half-an-hour ago, that he had decided on renouncing his wealth."

Fifine felt her heart stop. "For what reasons?" she asked with a great effort.

"I put him the same question; you are the reason."

"And he has sent you to tell me of it?"

"No, he is coming himself to-morrow; but, Fifine, when he comes, beware of what you do. Don't let your heart lead you astray."

"My heart has nothing to do with it. I shall follow the council of my head; and for better guidance, tell me what I am to beware of."

Krantz held his breath for a moment before throwing his trump-card.

"Of giving yourself to a murderer."

Fifine staggered back and leant against the

chimney-piece, pale and panting. "Camille a . . ." she gasped at last.

Krantz nodded; his silence would drive his utterance home more surely than a hundred iterations.

"What has he done?—whom has he killed?" came haltingly from Fifine.

"His cousin—fratricide, one degree removed." And then Krantz went on fluently, telling her of the details by which he had pieced together his conjectures, which Camille's own unspoken evidence that evening had converted into certainty.

"But all this is only a suspicion on your part," said Fifine, when she knew all.

"You will see him to-morrow; tax him with it, and see how he will face the charge."

"Tax him with it?" she echoed. "Why should I? What is it to me whether he is innocent or guilty?"

"You see, Fifine," Krantz went on breathlessly, "I might have told it you before, but I saw no occasion for it. Now, however, when he is stretching out his hand for you, contaminating you—you, of all other women in the world, I knew it was high time to speak, and therefore I have spoken. Have I done you a service by it, Fifine?"

Had he, or had he not done her service by telling? She was deliberating. Suppose Camille came to her to-morrow, with the news of what he had determined on doing for her sake, how would she meet him, if she had not known what she knew? She was sure what she would have done a week ago—told him that he could not obtain her whatever price he paid. But in the twenty-four hours since she had

seen him last, strange, undefinable thoughts had come to her. Again and again her mind had reverted to their forest ramble the day before. She had seen, more clearly than she had yet seen, the close-tethered agony, the dumb despair that lurked in his gloomy eyes, echoed from his trembling words; she still felt the hungering grip in which he had held her hand, momentarily, at parting, and she had seemed to read it all in a new light. And then there was his intended departure, and the tidings that he had not carried out his intention. For that, too, she had her interpretation: he had had two alternatives—one to go away, far beyond sight of her, where he might live down his love; the other, to stand with her on one level, and there to wrestle with her till she yielded. Would she have resisted to the end? Would she have stood firm against the force that seemed endowed with such mysterious powers of conquest? She could not answer. Love him she did not; she would have heard that he had died without feeling there was a void in the world. But he lived—lived close to her, and life was full of possibilities, of surprises, and one of them might have been—she hardly knew what. But not now; now she was fortified—there could be no more doubt, no more ambiguity. And for this unity of purpose she was indebted to Krantz. Now she could reply to his question.

“You have indeed done me a service,” she said; “you have given me another motive for keeping to my resolve, if I wanted one.” And she smiled bitterly.

“And one is grateful for such things—are you



"grateful to me?" asked Krantz, carried away by the moment.

Fifine looked at him astonished. She did not recognise the man. Was this the Krantz she knew—easy, nonchalant, phlegmatic Krantz? And if it was, what business had that look—half passion, half joyous expectancy—on his face? She had often seen him look at her—she had surprised his glance when he had not expected it; but this was a revelation.

"Why do you insist on my being grateful to you?" she asked in vague apprehension.

"Oh, there is no reason," he stammered confusedly. He had almost been too precipitate, and had saved himself by a hair-breadth.

At the same moment Ricotte entered. He came in stern and silent, and with a short nod to Krantz, sat down at the table, reached the lamp down from the wall, and began to rummage among a big bundle of documents he had brought with him.

Fifine put her arm round his neck. "Will you have your supper, father?" she asked.

"Not now, child; I am very busy. Don't wait up. I shall help myself later on." A moment after he was again buried in his work.

Without another word Fifine took her candle, and with a whispered "good-night," left the room. She knew how to deal with her father. Ricotte sat on, turning over paper after paper, reading, signing, correcting as he went along. Krantz watched him in patient silence; he would wait till Ricotte was ready for him. The hours passed; it was long after midnight; the oil in the lamp was beginning to fail, and Ricotte got up to replenish it.

"Hallo, Krantz!" he exclaimed; "still here? I had forgotten you."

"I am glad; it shows I have not disturbed you," replied Krantz. "You were absorbed as though it were a matter of life and death."

"It is that, Krantz," said Ricotte; "and I have no time to lose. I will tell you what it is while I draw breath. We have made our arrangements; our organisations are complete. To-morrow night—that is, this evening"—he looked at the clock as he caught himself up—"this evening the delegates from all the most important factories in the country meet at the 'Egalité!' We shall draw up a programme of operations, every man will take an oath to execute his share of them to the utmost of his power, and in a week's time all the industries of the land will be at our mercy."

His eye lit up with triumph as he continued: "At last I have achieved it; my sleepless nights shall end in a glorious morning for the people. Yes, I alone have done it—the others have given me merely the support of numbers. I had to cheer them on when they were despondent; I had to spur on the laggards and the indifferent. Single-handed, with my own strength, I have reared the great fabric, and now I pray that God will grant me health and life, only for a little while longer, because, otherwise, it will fall even now and overwhelm the people in its ruins."

He paused with his hand to his heart.

"Why should it fall?" asked Krantz.

"I don't know; I don't trust my good fortune. Now that I stand on the very threshold of success, I

feel each moment some malignant mischance might make me stumble."

"But you will succeed, Ricotte—you must. Why should you have been allowed to go all this way unless you were meant to accomplish your task? What have you to fear? Your fellow-workers are loyal, the people are ready to respond to their bidding; what will you gain by losing confidence in yourself at the critical hour?"

"I don't know, Krantz—I really don't know; I am a fool. There is nothing to fear; everything will prosper; I only wanted somebody to tell me so, to make me believe it myself. And now get to bed; these papers must be ready by the morning. Why do you look like that? You have something on your mind?" ran on Ricotte feverishly.

"It is nothing new," said Krantz; "it has been there for over three years—you know what I mean, Ricotte."

Ricotte turned pale. "Look here, Krantz," he said after a moment's thought; "there are only two things I hold dear in this world—my cause and my daughter. I don't know which takes the first place. It will be very hard on me when I lose one or the other; but to lose both would break my heart."

"But you won't lose your daughter," said Krantz. "I tell you you will gain a son in addition. And your cause is safe."

"Before it is gained I must count it as lost," said Ricotte gloomily.

"And what becomes of your promise?" asked Krantz.

"My promise holds good; all I want of you is

to be patient till the result of the scheme becomes apparent. When it does, take Fifine."

"And suppose it fails?"

"I am in your hands," replied Ricotte sadly.

Krantz was silent. "There may be a reason why there should be no more delay," he resumed.

"What reason?" asked Ricotte, puzzled.

Briefly Krantz went through once more the account of his interview with Camille. When he had finished Ricotte broke into a laugh.

"And you believe him, you dolt?" he cried. "Love the girl—why should he not? He has eyes in his head, I suppose? But don't come to me with that old woman's tale. The gold poison has got into his veins; he will never purge himself of it. At the best, there is some chicanery behind it; but tricks or no tricks, my promise to you shall be ratified, if it is with my last breath."

With a pleased smile Krantz turned to go.

"By the way, Krantz, come down to the 'Egalité' by eight to-night; I may want you," said Ricotte at the door.

"I shall be there; you can count on me."

And then Krantz softly tiptoed his way down the creaking staircase. Ricotte listened to the last sound, and went back to his work. With a great effort he pulled himself together. He felt shaken and uneasy, and the gloomy forebodings that had been flitting through his head all the day came back with redoubled force in the perfect silence. Gradually, he composed himself into self-oblivion, and hurried on with his task. The time went by till the dawn looked in at the window, and at six o'clock

he laid his pen down with a great breath of relief.

He felt a light touch on his shoulder, and shivered. It was Fifine bending over him.

"Why, you haven't been to bed, father!" she said, half-frightened; she did not remember such a thing occurring before.

"Don't be anxious, little one," said Ricotte, stroking her cheek. "It won't happen again after to-night. Hurry up with my breakfast, there's a good girl."

With a kindly look, that but rarely relieved his stubborn features, he watched her, as ever and anon she flitted by the open kitchen door. She was, indeed, a daughter to be proud of. Some one else he had known had looked like that nearly twenty years ago. Strange she should come into his mind that very morning; twenty years was a long time, and she had ceased to be a frequent memory with him. But if she could have seen her daughter that day, her heart would have swelled with joy likewise. His Fifine! Sometimes he had thought of her mother's death with a secret, shamefaced satisfaction, because by it he was ensured their child's undivided love. And now he was to share her with another. Quickly he blinked the tears out of his eyes. It must be done; there was no help for it. And why not Krantz? Without him what might have become of Fifine—her mother dead, her father in prison? Could it have been anything but friendship, pure and unalloyed, that had made Krantz take upon himself Ricotte's offence and punishment? At the time he had thought of no reward, and now that he asked for the stipulated recompense, was it manly, was it honest to refuse him? Ricotte almost

blushed at the selfishness that had made him feel weak and ignoble.

"Here it is," said Fifine, coming in with a great clatter of earthenware, "you must be ravenous. You did not touch your supper last night."

She placed the things on the table, and then sat down to watch him eat.

"Is there anything very important going to happen to-night?" she asked, with a strange sense of timidity she had never felt before her father.

"All depends on it," said Ricotte, breaking his bread into his bowl of milk and water. "When I come home," he continued, his eyes cast down, "I shall have something to say to you."

"Also important?"

"As important as the other."

Fifine felt slightly startled. It was very curious. Why should she connect her father's reply with the strangeness of manner she had noticed in Krantz last night? What had one to do with the other?

Ricotte rose and put on his cap. "I am off to work now," he said, with forced cheerfulness. "Good-bye little one; take care of yourself while I am away. A kiss—no, not like that—a good, strong one."

He strained her passionately to his heart.

"What is this, father?" asked Fifine suddenly. She had felt something very hard inside her father's coat pocket. Quickly she unbuttoned it, and saw the hilt of a dagger protruding. With a swift movement she had got hold of it, and had pulled it half-way out of its sheath.

"Oh, it's nothing," laughed Ricotte uneasily,

gingerly regaining possession of the weapon; "it's only what I cut my cheese with."

"It looks so sharp and cruel," she said; "you will be careful with it, very careful, father?"

"Of course, little coward." Then he turned to go. "By the way, Fifine," he said, taking a step backward, "if you have nothing better to do to-night, pray for me."

She nodded assent; the request did not startle her. She knew how much her father had the success of his plans at heart. Long and lingeringly she looked after him through the window. Was it not good and desirable to have such a man for one's father?

## CHAPTER EIGHTEENTH

## *BALANCING ACCOUNTS*

CAMILLE had left Krantz feeling hopeful and confident. The task he had set himself seemed now only half as formidable. Now that he had imparted his resolve to another, it was as though he had pledged himself to it—was bound to its accomplishing by inviolable obligations. It was no longer a matter of cold-blooded, cold-reasoning freewill, a thing left for him to decide; some one had taken the responsibility of action off his hands. True, it was only Krantz, a man of small account. But from Krantz it would come to Ricotte, and to go back would be earning Ricotte's contempt. There was something terrible, volcanic, in Ricotte's friendship, but his contempt must be annihilating. It would also reach Fifine; what would she think if he recanted? "A man of straw, shifting and drifting in the wind, constantly at issue with himself, whimsical as a child," she would say. He had tasted of Fifine's indifference—it was refined torture; but her scorn must be purgatory everlasting.

Now he could draw up his plan. First Fifine's consent. Of course she would make things hard for him; he had refused to take her on trust, and a woman does not forget that easily. But he had done



it now, or, virtually, it was done. Surely that should be sufficient reparation. Next, there would be Ricotte's approval; Krantz would pave the way for that. And then into the thick of the fray. The tougher the struggle, the better he would like it, the more it would serve his purpose; there would be less time for backward glances at what he had left behind. And whenever he felt himself flagging, his cry of battle would cheer him on—his battle-cry, "Fifine!" Was that not enough to make a hero of the veriest coward?

He pictured it all in his own mind: the three of them—Ricotte, Fifine, himself—all working in one accord. How he would enter into the spirit of Ricotte's schemes—what a loyal lieutenant he would be to him. And between the two of them would stand the wife and daughter—wife first, daughter afterwards, one hand in each of theirs, the deity of their home, ministering to them and yet their mistress and queen. Was that not far better than to behold day after day the cheerless, heartless grandeur of these oaken panels, these coldly tessellated floors and corridors, the stiff ceremoniousness of the silken tapestries? He would exchange the vast, desolate chambers, where one felt so lonely and lost, for the homely simpleness of four garret walls, where one's eye could reach comfortably into every corner and cranny, and one's soul would not be terrified by the vague, indistinct shadows that lurked in the deep recesses, and sometimes took to themselves such terrible shapes. He was sickened of the clogging, cloying delicacies his table showed up in daily routine; he longed for the healthy, natural food he

had known of old, sauced by a keen-set appetite, giving tone and stamina to flesh and sinew and muscle, nourishing brain and body. A week ago it had seemed impossible; now there was something alluring, seductive in the prospect.

His ruminations kept him awake till the early morning. When he awoke from a fitful slumber, it was near mid-day.

"Hallo," he said to himself as he looked at the clock; "this is hardly a good beginning for a man who will have to work twelve hours a day to live through the twenty-four."

Briskly he dressed, donning his shabbiest clothes, put ten sous in his pocket, and started out. At the first cook-shop he passed he invested his ten sous in a humble meal; he thought it just as well to season his palate straightway to the change in his bill of fare. He laughed to himself as he finished; he was going to give himself a dessert for which the daintiest gourmand would envy him.

It was a dreary day with a threatening sky, and therefore he was sure of finding *Fifine* at home. He walked on with a jaunty step, busily thinking of all he would say to her and imagining her replies. One thing, at least, he was glad of: he had forced his fate to its crisis. Change it must—and for the worse it could not. He had reached the house before he had thought that half the distance had been traversed. From outside he could see *Fifine* moving at the open window. She saw him too, and for a moment their eyes were fixed on each other. She noted the joyous smile that broke over his face, and then averted her head without a sign of recognition.

Camille's heart turned into lead; he stopped, riveted to the ground as though with an iron vice. Then with a cry, half of anger, half of desperation, he flung himself forward, leapt quickly up the flight of stairs, and knocked vehemently at the door. Once he knocked, twice—there was no answer. Without waiting further he turned the handle and entered. Fifine stood with her back to the window, facing the intruder and eyeing him, icily calm. Camille took a few steps forward and held out his hand, and with a quick movement Fifine put her own behind her. For a whole minute they stood thus immovably—she rigidly stern, Camille petrified. At last she grew frightened at the hunted, maddened look that was distorting his features.

"Not that hand," she said.

"Why not?" he asked hoarsely.

"What has become of your cousin?" She not only saw but felt the shiver that rippled through his body; its vibration seemed to set herself trembling. There was no need to look at the ashy pallor of his face.

"My cousin?" he muttered. "What of him? He died long ago."

"And by that hand," she said, shrinking back.

"It is not true," he gasped.

"Not true?" Her words cut him like razors. "Not true? You let me see what I have seen just now, and then you deny it? Go!" she pointed imperiously to the door.

"Who told you this?" he asked, through chattering teeth.

"No matter. I know. You have confirmed it yourself."

"I have confirmed nothing," he shouted, stung to rebellion by his merciless destiny; "I might have prevented his death, but I am not his murderer; my hand is clean."

"This is miserable quibbling. Go! I have no patience with you," she cried contemptuously.

"Then you *shall* have patience," he said, and an iron resolution rang from his words. "You shall hear every syllable I have to utter; you shall—I command you!"

Fifine cowered back, but with a strange feeling of delight; that was how she wanted to see him—masterful, compelling, dominant; and then when he would be gone she would not be plagued by the memory of a whining, whimpering cur, owing to his misdeed abjectly, but of a man fighting, tooth and nail, for his right. And, of course, he had a right to be heard. So she listened to the impetuous rush of his words as they hurried over the whole sequence of events, beginning with the feud of the brothers, and ending with that autumn sunset, and the tragedy to which it had been witness.

"You say it was murder. O God! was it not human—human that the son should avenge the outraged memory of his father? And now punish me for it, if you like. You have punished me enough already."

Breathlessly Fifine had followed his narrative.

"How do I know you speak the truth?" she asked softly.

"Come with me to my father's grave, and I shall swear to it on the crucifix there."

She knew it would be superfluous to take him at

his word; the truth loomed large and patent in his eyes.

"But you say I have punished you," she continued. "I don't understand, you talk in riddles."

"You have made me love you with a love that has crucified my heart a hundred times a day. You have become the retribution of my crime, or whatever other name you give to it."

"I your retribution?" she asked, almost in a whisper; "what makes you think that?"

"I am convinced of it—my heart, my conscience tells me so; can I ask of a better oracle?"

Her face drooped into her hands, and she was silent.

"But look, Fifine," he went on, with an exultant ring in his voice, "the love you refused me has been my punishment; the love you shall give me shall be its remission. In your hand it was placed to chastise me; your hand also holds the warrant of my pardon. Give me your love, and all shall be well with me."

Gently he stroked the gleaming tresses of the stooping head.

"You know you have made it impossible for me to give you it," she said, looking up at last.

"And now I have made it possible," he cried triumphantly. "I have come to tell you so; there are no longer any barriers between us, Fifine."

And then he told her what she already knew, and had only half-believed. But now the intelligence brought so closely, so surely, home to her, carried only a great fear to her heart. What had she to give him in return for his abnegation? Not her

love, she was sure; she had no love to give him. She might give him her hand; but would he be satisfied, would the compromise be of any value? She would ask.

"We must be frank once for all," she said, standing upright and gazing at him steadily. "I told you only three days ago, I do not know what love is; if I have any, it is all spent on the duty that I have made mine. And so, if you wish us to go through life together, it can only be as *bons camarades*, and nothing more. Will that content you?"

Camille's brain whirled; go through life together—she had said it, even before he had spoken of it himself.

"Content, Fifine?" he replied; "I should be that on any terms, only to be always at your side, only for the privilege of calling you mine, my very own. And then, Fifine, you hardly know what you are saying. You have not made trial of this love of mine; you don't know how mighty it is. Even though you were of stone, it will ignite you, will set you ablaze with quick, responsive fire."

She shook her head gently. "Say, rather, my iciness will quench yours; keep your illusion if and while you can," she said; "but do not reproach me later on. I have warned you. Husband and wife we can be, boon-companions, fellow-workers; but lovers—never."

Camille stood pondering. There was something humiliating about the compact as she arranged it. A one-sided marriage—there seemed a sense of dreariness, a world of desolation in the idea. But what would he have? Whatever happiness he had

tasted in life, had it not always been doled out to him in scraps and tatters? And, therefore, why should this crowning blessing be portioned out to him full-handed, to his heart's satiety? Last night, after he had left Krantz, there had come back to him the phrase Krantz had once used, and which then had almost sounded to him like a prophecy: "You will have to measure your friends' friendship by' the distance they keep." Perhaps it was fated he should measure his wife's love by the same standard. One thing at least he might safeguard himself against.

"If it must be as you say, Fifine, tell me candidly: is there someone else, or do you think there may be?"

She looked at him firmly. "I understand," she said; "it is fair you should ask the question. And I answer, no. If I learn to love any one, it shall be you—none other. The links between us will be strong enough and numerous enough that we can dispense with one, and that the weakest. You need have no fear of my loyalty."

"So be it, then," said Camille, stretching out his hand. Without a moment's hesitation she placed her own in his.

"We must tell father as soon as possible," she said.

"He must know by now," said Camille.

"How? Have you told him?"

"Krantz has," said Camille; "he promised me last night he would do everything to make the way smooth for me."

"Krantz promised?" asked Fifine in surprise.

"Certainly ; was he not here last night ?"

"Yes, but don't rely on that," she said, trying hard to arrange her contradictory thoughts in order ; "father will require more than your word that—that the barrier between us has fallen. Can you bring him proof?"

Camille thought a little. "I can," he said ; "I shall bring him undeniable proof."

"When?"

"Some time this evening."

"There is no immediate hurry ; he will give you a little grace."

"There is hurry ; till things are definitely fixed, I shall know no rest. I shall come this evening."

She accompanied him to the door ; the slight, answering pressure of her hand was all the token she gave of the change that had taken place between them.

Camille went away, stifling his emotions. He had expected his wooing different. But then, as he knew from the past, he had only to expect in order to be disappointed. And yet he had gained a great deal—if not Fifine's love, the next best thing to it—Fifine herself. And, moreover, as she had said, there would be many bonds between them. They would encourage one another, they would work hand in hand—there would be the tie of daily companionship of the household—its joys, and still more, its sorrows. And if she could not help with her love, he had sufficient of it for the two of them.

So he passed on his way to Lavoisier. He had still a very hard task before him. Good, kind,



fatherly Lavoisier—Camille felt as if he were going to commit some heinous crime. And then his determination gained hold of him with almost beast-like brutality. Why should he pity any one—he who had never, as far as he knew, met with pity himself; he from whom the full tithe of suffering had been exacted without the least remission? Firm and resolute he reached the house. Lavoisier was out; he was not expected back till six that afternoon. Camille prepared to wait for him. Colourlessly, monotonously, the time dragged on; but he felt no impatience—only a great desire to rest, to recruit. He was spent, slack, unstrung. He wondered whence all the energy of endurance, of which he had had need in the past, had come to him, and how much more of it he could have mustered. Otherwise his mind was a blank. He knew there were great, decisive things to be done and undone, but for the present he only wished to be still and unconscious of all.

He woke up to find Lavoisier beaming on him cheerfully. •

“Had a good doze, eh?” he was saying. “That’s right. Sleep cools the blood. I should not have disturbed you, but they tell me you have been waiting since three. So I presume you have something interesting for me. Any more scrapes, you young fire-eater?”

In a moment Camille was collected. “Yes, something very interesting,” he said grimly; by the way, Lavoisier, do you feel well—thoroughly well?”

“It’s a question I once asked you,” laughed the lawyer; “you want to have your joke with me.

I shall answer as you did : I never felt better in my life." He looked closer. "Here, what do you mean by this masquerade?" he said, pointing to Camille's shabby attire; "don't your tailors give you any more credit?"

"I have a little part to act," replied Camille; "and I thought I would act it in character."

"What part?"

"That of a mere proletarian."

"Then you will have to draw on your invention tremendously, unless your memory will aid you, laughed Lavoisier.

"Neither my invention nor my memory," said Camille. And then he thought there had been enough of bush-beating.

"I suppose you have the documents you drew up before the—the day before yesterday?" he asked.

"I have," replied the lawyer. "Strange, coming along I thought it was time to tear them up again."

"You will not tear them up," said Camille, quietly. "You will execute the provisions they contain to the letter."

"You will give me leave to wait for your obsequies first," said Lavoisier.

"No, I wish it done in my life-time; at once, in fact."

"You haven't had enough sleep, my dear fellow," said Lavoisier, smiling painfully; "your senses have got slightly mixed."

Slowly Camille rose, laid his hand on Lavoisier's shoulder, and said, voicing each word clearly :

"Do I look like a man whose senses are mixed? I knew that what I tell you would sound incredible

to you, and therefore I repeat it; you will carry out the provisions laid down, to the very letter. I herewith authorise you to deal with my possessions in accordance with the depositions in my testament. If you refuse, I shall immediately get another accredited attorney to execute them in your stead. Does that sound clear and intelligible?"

Lavoisier turned pale to his lips. Without another word, he unlocked the secrétaire and fetched out a bundle of documents, counted them, and skimmed through the contents.

Then stiffly and coldly he turned to Camille.

"M. Clairmont," he said, "I shall require your authorisation in writing."

Immediately Camille sat down and commenced. Lavoisier stood at his elbow, suggesting phrases here and there, in accordance with legal formality.

"To be disposed of within a week from date," he read; "it is short notice, but I shall do my utmost to give you satisfaction professionally. And now, M. Clairmont," and the lawyer bowed low, "as I was the first to congratulate you on having come into your fortune, so let me be the first to congratulate you on being one of the most munificent benefactors the world has ever seen."

"I must take your congratulations as genuine," said Camille, with a smile; "and, therefore, I trust it will be no disillusion for you to hear that my primary motive is not to benefit the world as much as myself."

"Camille, Camille," said Lavoisier in a choking voice, and seizing both his hands; "must it be—must it?"

"It must, my dear old friend," said Camille, huskily; "I cannot tell you everything now, but, believe me, I am acting for my best. If a man has a canker in his flesh, he must cut it out, or else the putrefaction will spread through all his limbs. My wealth has been the canker of my soul, has been rotting it away; unless I cast it from me, I shall never know what it is to be happy. Don't force my secret from me—don't ask to share the knowledge of the inevitable destiny that has dogged my life hitherto. Some day—not now—I may tell it you of my own accord."

Lavoisier took no pains to resist the tears that welled to his eyes. "Yes, Camille," he said, "I was beginning to understand; it was dawning on me there were spectres in your life. Whatever they are, I know you have been more sinned against than sinning. Keep to your resolve; I can see you are terribly in earnest. I know now why you provoked Pitoignac, and what the duel meant. You want to begin your life afresh, with the past blotted out by atonement. You are a hero, Camille—that sounds better than saint. And now, let me ask of you a favour—one; avail yourself of my help—give me the privilege of assisting you in the new start."

"I don't know where your help will come in," answered Camille, looking at him gratefully; "but I promise."

"That is right—you promise," cried Lavoisier joyfully. And then, giving way before the onset of his emotions, he flung his arm about Camille's neck, and stroked the thick brown hair, whispering :

"My poor boy ; my poor Camille."

"I don't need your pity, I assure you," said Camille gently ; "don't think I have been so very unselfish and improvident. For the sacrifice I make, I have taken care to prepare for myself a kingly reward."

"God grant that it may turn out as you expect," said Lavoisier solemnly. "And now, Camille, be so good as to leave me. You did right to ask me if I felt well and strong. I could not go through another quarter of an hour like this last. Go, and come again early to-morrow, and then we shall sit down and talk about your future."

"One moment only and I am done," said Camille ; "give me a receipt."

"For what purpose?"

"I need it for my own satisfaction, if nothing else."

In two minutes Lavoisier handed him the desired statement. Camille read quickly :

"I, the undersigned, being appointed executor of Camille Clairmont, hereby testify to having received the effects of the said Camille Clairmont, his real and personal property, and all other values appertaining to his estate for distribution among the several and various hospitals, asylums, orphanages, and other charities, as named in the testament of the said testator, which has been placed in my charge. Signed : Arnaut Lavoisier, lawyer and attorney."

"Of course, this is merely provisional," said Lavoisier ; "the formal receipts will be the acknowledgments of the several institutions as they come to hand."

"This is all I require," said Camille, carefully

bestowing the paper in his pocket. "*Au revoir*, then—to-morrow."

One firm hand-shake, and Camille was again traversing the streets. The evening was young yet; he calculated Ricotte would be home by ten for certain. Fifine had forgotten to mention the "Egalité" meeting. So he had an hour or two to spare to go home and order his papers. As he entered the house he felt like an intruder. He remembered the first time he had set foot in it, a stranger, his heart quaking with fear. He had as little right to it now as he had then, and he wondered that Baptiste, as he met him in the hall, passed him so unconcernedly, without ordering him away. And yet his heart was light and buoyant, as if a load had been taken from it. At last he was rid of it all; had he known it would be so easy, he would have disencumbered himself long ago. But, no doubt, it all had to come in its due and appointed time; not a moment sooner. Those seven months of possession had been seven months of penitence; the agony had been in the anticipation, not in the final wrench.

There was not much to do. He sorted out his father's letters, made up into a parcel the few paltry belongings he had brought with him, and took from the *escritoire* forty-five francs, the sum he had had on his person at the time of his return from the army. So he had balanced his accounts, finally and definitely; he had paid his debts and was a free man. In the morning he would turn his back on the nightmare he had been living, would strike out into the world, with Fifine at his side to help him over the rough and steep places in the journey.

And Fifine, meanwhile, was sitting at the window in her garret, gazing dreamily into the sunset, and trying to realise what that day had been to her. While Camille had been in her sight, she had felt so sure of herself; but now the doubts and the conflicts were beginning over again, and one by one she had to battle them down. Had she done right in giving herself away without a stronger motive than her own generosity? Had she been tricked into it by some sham sentiment of the moment, that now seemed trivial and insufficient in the light of dispassionate reflection? Perhaps it was the thought of his devotion, of his unalterable faith in her, that had won her over; perhaps her sorrow at having been the cause of so much suffering to him. And at that a vague resentment reared itself in her heart. Where had been the necessity of it to her? Why had he come into her cognisance at all—why had he been furnished with an occasion to make her his yoke-fellow, she who hated restraint and wished to range free through the high-roads and side-paths of life? And then again, she thought that a man whose heart had been chastened in the crucible of pain, a man strong enough to do what he had done, must be a desirable possession. It must be good, indeed, to lean against some support which, one could be sure, would not yield—which would transfuse into one new strength by the mere contact. She had felt all this when she had looked at him, and therefore, when he came again, he would bring the feeling back with him. And since they were to be near each other ever and always, she need have no fear that it would lose its grip upon her.

She looked up; the crimson ocean out to the west was becoming streaked and diapered with islands and promontories of amber; dimmer and dimmer grew the roseate splendour, merging into the colourless immensity of the evening sky. A clock struck from the nearest church steeple—it was eight or nine, she did not know which. She had nearly forgotten her promise. Reverently she went down on her knees, and prayed for her father's success, for the achievement of his desires, for the defeat of his enemies. And when she had finished, she prayed for herself, for a heart undivided in its purpose, firm in its resolves, steadfast in its inclinations, true to its offices. She needed, indeed, the blessing of God on this new enterprise of hers, whereof the issue lay so dark and inscrutable before her.

"Let me not falter in this new duty of mine, let me not swerve from the old, and whatever I do, let it be done well," she prayed.

Then she rose, groping her way in the darkness, which in the meantime had closed around her. She lit the lamp, and busied herself with the household. Her father would probably be very late that night; but Camille would come before, and there were many things to be talked about.

Half an hour passed; she was ready with her preparations, and sat down to wait. Her head was aching, and there was a heaviness in her heart that made her tired and listless. The next minute her ear caught a confused sound at the bottom of the street that came nearer and nearer.

"Some roysterers," she thought, and leant back again.



But the noise grew louder and louder, not as that of a handful of people, but of a large multitude. It seemed to stop before the house. Hastily she ran to the window and looked out. The moon was up, but she could distinguish nothing except a black sea of heads, along which a buzz of subdued excitement ran in billows of sound. What did they want here? And then it struck her, perhaps it was an ovation to her father; perhaps they had brought him home in triumph like the conqueror he was; and yet again, if it was so, why did they not shout aloud, and cheer, and throw up their hats? There was something strange and weird and terrifying about it all. She must go down and inquire.

And just then, heavy, lumbering steps as of people carrying a burden came up the staircase. It was as though a spell bound her to the spot; she could not move a step forward to the door. The next instant it was flung open, and in came Krantz, his head drooping over his chest, his eyes roving unsteadily.

"For the love of God, what has happened?" wrenched itself from Fifine's lips.

Instead of answering, Krantz turned to those behind him, motioning them to enter. Then he placed himself in front of Fifine to obstruct her view, and pointing to the couch, said: "Lay him here." And then he turned to the girl who was standing in an agony of apprehension, clasping and unclasping her hands.

"Be calm, Fifine," he said; "an accident has happened to your father—nothing dangerous . . ."

With a wild cry she dashed past him, and flung

herself down before the prostrate body on the couch. Was this her father—this huddled thing with its clothes all tatters and ribbons, with the glazed eyes and the bloodless face? Why, her father had gone out only a few hours ago, sturdy as an oak, spruce and smart and upright, and the colour of a cherry in his cheeks. Then she saw his glance had caught hers; the shrunken lips tried to force a smile, the limp hand struggled to her head. Ah yes, she knew it was he, and between her agonised gasps she called him:

“Father, father, speak to me!”

She felt a hand on her shoulder, and when its grip tightened till she had to look up, she saw a grave man standing over her.

“Come away, child,” the grave-looking man was saying; “your father is very weak. You must not trouble him; at least, not till he is better.” He slurred over the last few words, and turning to Krantz, continued in a whisper: “A half an hour at the utmost—send for a priest.”

“One came with us,” said Krantz.

“Then let him get to his business; mine is done,” said the doctor.

Krantz led Fifine to the window; she followed him, dazed and mechanically, listening to, but not half understanding the string of words that unrolled itself from his lips: how the club had been surprised—the police had received information, and had planned a raid; the proceedings had advanced as far as the distributing of the billets—the papers were lying open on the table, when the *gendarmes* burst in. With a leap Ricotte had sprung forward,

but they had intercepted him, and were laying hold of the documents; and then Ricotte, who knew that if they seized them, it would be ruin to himself and a dozen others—fathers of families—fought for them, wildly, madly, for he had no chance against the odds. And when he saw the others deserting him, out flashed his dagger, and in the scuffle the point was turned against him.

"Bear up, Fifine," whispered Krantz; "rely on me; your future is safe in my hands, if your father should . . . Let me speak to him a moment."

It was getting late—ten minutes out of that precious half-hour had gone; it would be his own fault if he got baulked of his desire in the very nick of attainment.

"Remember your promise, Ricotte," he whispered in the dying man's ear.

A thrill of recollection seemed to shake Ricotte from head to foot.

"Yes, yes, it must be done," he gasped. "I said I should ratify it with my last breath. I did not know how truly I spoke. Bring Fifine to me."

Faltering at every step she dragged herself to his side. Gently he drew her head near to his mouth, and told her what he expected her to do.

"O God! he is raving," she said, looking up helplessly at Krantz.

Ricotte caught the words. "No, child," he said; "I am not mad, I am only dying. I have sworn this thing to Krantz, and it is in your hands to let your father die a perjurer or not."

"Oh, is it true, Krantz?" she wailed. "Surely you will not insist on it; you are jesting—a cruel, cruel jest."

"I am not jesting," came deliberately from Krantz; "I love you, Fifine; I have loved you since your childhood. It has been my life's dream that you would throw in your lot with mine. You see, it is your father's wish as well. Ask him again."

Imploringly she looked into the eyes that seemed glazing more and more each moment. But she read in them only confirmation.

The room had emptied. At the foot of the couch stood the priest telling his beads; in a corner sat the doctor, waiting for the last, pen and ink ready to make out certificate of death. All the others had gone. Downstairs the buzz of the crowd was getting thinner and thinner; probably the police were clearing them away. The chamber was very still. In Fifine's brain an iron hammer was striking an anvil with a ringing clang that sent her distracted. This, then, was the vague fear that had haunted her all day. What was she to say?—what was she to do? If it had only been she who was lying there in the throes of death, and not her father! Her father dying! She had not realised that yet; she would require hours, days, weeks, to bring that home to her; but to be Krantz's wife? That had taken hold of her perception and clung to it; had glued itself on her understanding till she understood nothing else. The whole world was full of it.

A shudder ran through Ricotte and bent him double.

"Well, Fifine?" asked Krantz feverishly. "Every moment might mean success or failure."

"But I cannot—I cannot!" she cried despairingly. "I have no longer the right to consent; since to-day I am pledged to Camille."

"You must break your pledge; you must marry Krantz," came in deep, long sobs from Ricotte; "I should like to have died with it; but if you force me . . ."

And with the few throbs of life that still remained to him he told her the tale of the debt he owed Krantz.

"Before I die, Fifine," he pleaded; "before I die."

With a quick gesture she placed her hand in that of Krantz. On Ricotte's lips some words were flitting. Fifine interpreted them rightly: "Let the priest give you his blessing," they meant.

And then she knelt down, with Krantz at her side, and loud and clear rose up the utterance:

"In the name of our Holy Church, I betroth this woman unto this man."

And then the door opened noiselessly, and on the threshold stood Camille, with a look that had frozen into dumb horror on his face. There he stood listening to the formula as it was being repeated a second and yet again for a third time. He had heard the dread news from a few stragglers who had remained behind, he had rushed up to the house in mad anxiety, and had been stopped by the *gendarme* who stood sentry at the door. But he had secured entrance by his indignant—

"Why, man, he is my affianced wife's father."

And now—"his affianced wife,"—it was a lie, a damnable lie! There she was plighting herself to another man; surely his eyes and his ears could not

both deceive him. Why had he come there?—what was his purpose there now? She was lost to him, as far beyond his reach as if she were dead and buried. He did not know if he himself was not dead and buried likewise; he must go back into the cool darkness outside, and find out.

So he turned, shutting the door behind him very gently—his last look had rested on Ricotte's dead face—and walked downstairs and into the street, past the astonished *gendarme*, muttering to himself—

“My affianced wife; it is a lie—a lie!”

And then he passed on through the roaring thoroughfares, feeling so strangely still and quiet amid the tumult. It was no narcotic stillness, no paralysed lethargy of sensation; the spirit of rest and calm was trickling through his brain, his heart, in drops of a soothing nepenthe, allaying, blunting the stings that had been prodding him there ever and anon. Unconsciously, as though following some magnetic force, he set his face towards the river, and presently he stood at its brink, dreamily gazing into the waters that flowed so tardily because they were molten silver. Overhead the sky had cast off its drab, sullen robe of clouds, had adorned itself with a myriad multitude of sapphires and emeralds, and in the midst of them hung the full moon like a great mirror made of the afterglow of the glittering star-diamonds. But their rays seemed not only to pierce the volume of the full-bosomed river—they made their way right into the privacy of Camille's soul, lighting up its most abysmal depths. And by their light he could see that every cranny of his soul was swept of the demons of

unrest that had inhabited it so long. And that was why it felt so wide and roomy, so loftily airy, so clean and clear and transparent; it was a new soul, and it had made for its habitation a new body. Camille thought: Why had he been dragged here—to the deadly waters with their treacherous allurements? Well, they had not been disappointed. They had received the old soul and the old body that had become worn-out and effete with their agonies, their sufferings. But over him, the new Camille with the new life quick in him, their spell was of no avail; he stood before them calm, conquering, triumphant. Solemnly and soberly he threw another glance on the molten silver masses; they had a claim to his respect—they were the grave of his old self—the grave, not the mere cenotaph. And then he turned from them with a springing step—the new soul was as wings to the new body. What was all this vague remembrance of a human life for which he was answerable?—of a woman's love that had been gnawing at his heart with a thousand teeth? It was all a mad, mad dream; it might have happened in another life he had lived. And if it had, what did it matter now? It all lay buried at the bottom of the river, with the old soul, the old body. Thank God!—thank God!—he lifted his hands high into the star-gleaming night. He had atoned; he had been forgiven; it was ended, his penance, his martyrdom. The stars in the heavens said so; it came to him in music from the slow harmonious river-waves; it was ended. And if he could not believe them, he had for himself a sure, unfailing test elsewhere.

He reached his house, he let himself in, and without a tremor he made his way to the chamber that to him had ever seemed haunted with fiends—the pandemonium of his remorse. The same moonlight he had seen on the river spread in a broad sheet over the walls, and its halo played about the picture, the sight of which he had thought must ever chase him afar with lashes of unhuman terror. And now he stood before it, alone, with no one at his side—no one—no one—and its eyes, that had gazed into his so balefully, had lost their semblance of vindictive malice. The frowning lips were smiling, and the hands looked as though, if they could but move, they would lift themselves up in benediction. On a sudden impulse he lifted the frame from off the wall, pressed his mouth long and fervently to the face on the canvas, and replaced it with reverent caressing touch. This was their reconciliation.

Then, with one last look, he closed the door, went to his room, took up the little bundle of his belongings, and with a bounding tread, walked out through the long corridor. And when his foot had left the last step of the outer threshold, a long, loud shout—a pæan of triumph rang from his lips. At last he could cry quits with the past. And old Baptiste upstairs, hearing the shout, and recognising the voice, fell on his knees and prayed for his master.

A week later Camille was standing on board a steamer bound for New Orleans. The last bell had



sounded, warning visitors and friends of passengers to leave.

Lavoisier was holding Camille's hand. "Good-bye, my boy," he was saying, struggling with his sobs; "good-bye, and may good fortune follow you into the new world you are making for. One day you will return—one day, when you can quite trust yourself."

Camille watched him cross the gangway, watched him dwindle into a mere speck in the distance as the great vessel ploughed outward on its way, and then a smile came over his face.

"When you can quite trust yourself!" The warning was superfluous. As he had known his danger, so he knew his safety; as he had known the conflict, so he knew the peace that had been granted him. Even the lesser pangs of puzzled perplexity as to the facts that had conduced to the scene at Ricotte's death-bed—even these had been banished by Fifine's letter of explanation, wherein she had begged him to spare her the necessity of exonerating herself to his face.

"We have both been the playthings of circumstance," she wrote; "and the issue to which we have been brought is without appeal. That alone should convince us that it has been for the best. I am resolved to stand by the decision of fate, and to turn it to the truest account. I know you will not submit to be shamed in resolution by a woman. I would have done my utmost to help you, had I been permitted; but do not despair of yourself—your surest helpmeet will be your own manhood."

The letter had been addressed to Hotel Clairmont,

and the still dumbfounded Baptiste had taken it, as he had been enjoined to do with all communications, to M. Lavoisier's office. It was after the lawyer had handed it to him that Camille had told him what the "spectres in his life" had been, and Lavoisier, in accordance with Camille's permission, had retailed the whole story, as he heard it, to his crony, Doctor Charpot, the celebrated pathologist.

"An *idée fixe*, Lavoisier?" the great specialist had remarked; "I can hardly dismiss it so summarily. To a temperament of extremes, as I understand Clairmont's to be, the most trifling hallucination will take the form of a quivering reality; and you will admit Clairmont's had much more justification for growing into an intense conviction, a tight-strung obsession. And that is why I believe his assertion that his love for the girl, to which he attributes—rightly or wrongly, who shall say?—a somewhat supernatural character, had received its quietus. The shock of learning that she was utterly lost to him would be enough to bring about a radical revulsion—call it petrification of feelings. What he wants now is a change, but a change that is a revolution—not the mere shifting from scene to scene of the hyperchondriac valetudinarian, pampering his disease in lazy luxury, but the upheaval from his surroundings of a man, who, if he wants to live at all, must begin his life all over again, where the shadow of his past cannot reach him. And, therefore, he is doing what he should in giving up his millions; the memory of how he came by them would prey on his mind and body, and kill him or his reason in less than a year."

Camille knew nothing of this scientific analysis of his case; but he knew he was doing what he should even without such high professional corroboration. All through he had always consulted himself, had been his own physician. And now his course lay straight before him. Behind him lay the six years since he had left the Normandy village, cut off, amputated from the bulk and body of his life. He had lived through them as one toils with stress and struggle through an arduous ravine, which, by slow transition, leads the wayfarer into the far-spreading valley, where the terrors of the breathless defile are forgotten in the delight of freer scope, of unshackled endeavour. And as Camille stood on the poop of the fast-speeding vessel, he almost reeled with joy at the certainty that he belonged to himself again, that his strength and his weakness, his labour and his rest, his action and his thought, were all his own, with no one, man or woman, living or dead, for arbiter. He looked for a moment upon the radiant summer sky, clenched his fist to feel the muscle of his arm swell all the length up to his shoulder, and with a breathed prayer of hope and thankfulness, turned his eyes to the fathomless West.

THE END.

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